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# HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE

# BOOK OF JOSHUA.

THE

# Preacher's Complete Homiletical

# COMMENTARY

ON THE

# OLD TESTAMENT

*(ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN)*

With Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indices, &c., &c.

BY

VARIOUS AUTHORS.

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# HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF

# JOSHUA,

WITH

Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indices, etc

BY THE

REV. F. G. MARCHANT.

New York
FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
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# *HOMILETIC COMMENTARY*

ON

# JOSHUA.

## Preface.

THE aim of this work is not critical, but moral and spiritual exegesis. The Author's wish has been to expound *the principles of Divine teaching* contained in the history, and to present the result of his study of these principles in a way which may be useful to any preachers or students of God's Word, who, like himself, may feel suggestions from other minds helpful to their own. No apology seems necessary for a work of this kind; why should it be? Why should the pulpit suppose entire originality, and the class room almost none? Why should public teachers in every other department of life freely make use of the results of scholastic attainments, feel no wrong in doing so, and be thought no evil of, if it be utterly wrong in any and every measure for preachers to avail themselves of the results of such gifts or attainments in their brethren as may best bear fruit in the unfolding of moral or spiritual truth? These questions, it need hardly be said, are not meant to excuse dishonesty, but to vindicate the right of every man to walk in Homiletic fields of thought with at least as much liberty as in fields theologic, philosophic, or scientific. Probably nothing has more tended to independent thought in preaching than the very free reading of sermons, so common in religious circles in the present day: never were so many sermons published and bought as now, and it may be said with almost equal certainty, never was the pulpit so original and strong as now. The power of others, rightly used, tends to our own strength. It is with the consciousness of the absolute truth of this that this work has been written; how far it may be helpful, others must judge.

In outlines of discourses the style must necessarily be more or less abrupt. In the "Main Homiletics" an effort has been made throughout to avoid two evils—the giving of mere heads of thought, which probably are of small use to any one, and the extension of thought into that fulness of style which, however suitable for the pulpit itself, would fruitlessly occupy space, and possibly tend to weariness. Reducing the "bundle of hay" will make no more "needles;" it may encourage

research, if such as may be there are more readily found. The "Suggestive Comments," as far as seemed desirable, have been thrown into homiletic form, it being felt that they might be more useful given in some systematic manner, than if written as disconnected thoughts; on the other hand, thoughts which seemed to promise assistance in expounding the truth of a verse or passage have not been rejected because for want of coherence it might be inconvenient to bring them under such arrangement. Free use has been made of the best Commentaries and writings on the book, although, excepting some of the detached comments and some outlines acknowledged *in loco*, the work is the Author's throughout. An attempt has been made to give one or more outlines on every passage in the text likely to furnish matter for preaching, and as much illustration has been supplied as seemed to promise aid in intensifying the thought without too much encumbering the pages.

A critical or extensive Introduction to the book of Joshua is not necessary. Every private library which aspires to be theological will probably have at least two or three good and sufficient notices of the Author, the Date, the Chronology, the Unity, the Credibility, and the Design of this first of the so-called "Historical Books of Scripture." Keil makes a remark on which it is well to lay much stress—"The Christian revelation cannot be fully understood without a thorough acquaintance with that of the Old Testament which prepared the way for it; and this again cannot be comprehended without a careful study of the history of the Old Testament." We may call the time during which Israel was ruled by Joshua and the succeeding Judges "the most *secular* period of sacred history;" it is none the less important. The "*moral tone*" of the people who hear, and are called upon to practise what they hear, may be lower than it should be; the books giving the history of these people under Joshua and the various Judges may be much taken up in recounting a history of failure and sin; this says nothing whatever against *the "moral tone" of the Scriptures that apply to this period:* all the more, and certainly not the less, should we mark that the teachings of God and His prophets here are as lofty in their character as those of the Pentateuch, the Kings, or the Prophets. The people who hear and ought to perform may transgress, but there is no flagging in the zeal of inspired teaching. If this be so, the lessons in "Joshua" are as valuable for Christian preachers as those elsewhere, and in point of interest they have this advantage—they shew us the principles which, at the very beginning, God lays down for the guidance of the nation which, in distinction from all others upon earth, He calls to be His own. Here, more than anywhere else in the Bible, we may look for the initial teachings of God to His "peculiar people" in the initial forms of their national life. Theocracy in its earthly infancy ought not to furnish a history barren or unfruitful in instruction to a Church which often needs "the first principles of the oracles of God," to expose the sophistries which may be more readily connected with advanced forms of truth as presented in the Apostolic Epistles.

It is with the deepest conviction that no part of the Bible will ever be found to be "out of date," and that the book of Joshua contains much of Divine truth, eminent, even among the Holy Scriptures, in its suitability for the instruction of all men in the present day, that this work has been undertaken. May He who moved holy men of old to the writing of the text, grant His rich blessing to this further attempt at its exposition.

WANDSWORTH, *February*, 1875.

## CHAPTER I.

### *THE CALL TO WAR, AND THE RESPONSE.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. And it came to pass after**—*Vayehi achrea.*] The conjunction indicates that the history is a continuation of Deuteronomy. This suggests that Joshua was probably the writer of the last chap. of Deut. He takes up and carries on his own record from the point where he left off recounting the death, burial, and character of Moses. **After the death**] Including the thirty days' mourning,—Deut. xxxiv. 8. **Moses' minister**] Not the servant, but "the adjutant," chief helper. The Seventy translate τῷ ὑπουργῷ. The formal appointment is reported, Num. xxvii. 15—23. **3. Every place that the sole**] Every place against which your faith and courage lead you to go up, shall be yours. Your inheritance in the land shall have no limits but those set by your own unbelief and fears. As far as you will tread, you shall possess. **6. Be strong and firm**—(Schroeder)] "The words signify not firmness and strength in general, but the strength in the hands and the firmness in the knees, Isa. xxxv. 3, cf. Heb. xii. 12, 13" (J. H. Michaelis). **11. Prepare you victuals**] Herein speaks both the prophet and the soldier. As God's prophet, Joshua anticipates the cessation of the manna, and prepares the people for the new phase of life on which they must soon enter (chap. v. 12). As a soldier, he looks with his keen military forecast to the busy hours of the march, and to that closer massing of the people, which would be unfavourable for gathering their usual food. **Within three days**] Perhaps the best solution is indicated by Knobel, "The three days mentioned in chap. iii. 2, are identical with the three days here in ver. 11." The march from Shittim to Jordan would, in this case, have been made during the absence of the spies, the events of chap. ii., on the one hand, and of chap. iii. 1, on the other, being concurrent. Thus taken, the spies would rejoin the host, not at Shittim, from whence they went out, but immediately before Jordan. **14. All the mighty men**] All of those selected for the campaign. About 40,000 passed over, leaving upwards of 70,000 effective men to guard the women and children. (Cf. chap. iv. 13; Num. xxvi. 7, 18, 34.)

### *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1, 2.

THE WAY OF GOD IN HIS PURPOSES.

The Divine purpose was to bring the children of Israel onward into Canaan. Moses was just dead; Joshua is here called to succeed him. This juncture gives us interesting light on the plans of God, and man's relation to their fulfilment. I. God's plans are not dependent on men. When Moses dies, He has Joshua ready. The halt in the plains of Moab has in it nothing of hesitancy, but merely sufficient of decency. There is no halting in God's purpose till another leader can be found. Joshua was prepared *in his own mind and consciousnsss.* Past counsel with Moses had made him familiar with God's way and will. Past victories had given him confidence in God. Past communications from God had pointed to his leadership. Thus, forty years before, "Rehearse it in the ears of Joshua." (Ex. xvii. 14.) Joshua was equally prepared *in the minds of the people.* They had seen God giving him victory over Amalek at Rephidim. They had seen him honouring God when the multitude were disobedient. He had no

part in the folly of Aaron and the people at Sinai. (Cf. Ex. xxxii. 17.) Caleb and he had stilled the murmurs which followed the report of the spies. They had seen him openly honoured by Moses. (Deut. xxxi. 7, 8.) They had seen him thus honoured by God. (Num. xxvii. 18—23; Deut. xxxi. 14, 15.) Thus there could be no question, with either Joshua or the people, who was to succeed Moses. The work never halted. From this promptitude of Providence learn—1. That no man is necessary to God. 2. That the work of the godly man is not suffered to collapse. Such workers are not like children in the winter, engaged in making mere snow men, which the first sun shall melt away for ever. He who labours within the scheme of God's purpose, necessarily works for immortality. 3. A succession of able men, in Divine works, is a token of God's continued interest in and presence with a people. **II. God's plans are, sometimes, BEST ADVANCED by the removal of men who have been eminently useful.** Moses was not to enter the promised land, and no advance could be made while he lived as leader. He thus barred the way. In addition to this, Moses was not the man for the future. He had been the best of men for the past. Moses was best to stand before Pharaoh; Joshua before the Canaanites. Moses was fittest for the sea and the wilderness; Joshua for the fortified cities. Moses was the right man to lead the people out from slavery in Egypt; Joshua was the best to organise them into civilised life. Moses had, indeed, shewn neglect as to organisation when in the wilderness; Jethro had supplied a deficiency in his management. 1. To die in the midst of work is not to have lived in vain. You make way for others. 2. The mistakes of our lives are not less harmful because God uses our work generally. Meribah was still a blunder and a sin. **III. God's plan sometimes shews the inferior man succeeding where the more eminent man has failed.** "The Lord spake to *Moses' minister*, Moses is dead, now therefore arise, go over," etc. We do not know what or who is most helpful to success. We often fail to discern success when it does come. Winter is as much a success as spring. The frost and the sun are alike God's prophets to the vegetable world. The night is as much inspired to preach as the day, and it too has blessing. In a world of sin, it may be that disease is more successful than health. 1. *Work on, whoever you are.* You may not be as Moses, who was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and trained for forty years at the back of the desert. You may be only as Joshua, who was simply a liberated slave, with "good parts" about him. Work on, for you may succeed where better men fail. 2. But let not him who happens to be working in the hour of success *forget the labour of his predecessors.* Joshua's work was simply the harvesting; the tilling and sowing and weeding had been arduously completed by Moses. **IV. The fruit of God's plans, though developed very humanly and naturally, IS STILL A GIFT.** "The land which I do give." The corn may be the natural result of cultivation, yet it is the gift of "the Lord of the harvest." **V. God's plan and its issues have their HIGHEST RELATION not to one man, or two, but to men at large.** "Which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel." This is no mere question of Moses *versus* Joshua. The land is for Israel; God's gift to the nation. The honour of Moses, and the prestige of Joshua, are, comparatively, small things. God's great idea is gifts and blessings for the people. Nor should we read this even as a question of Israel *versus* Canaan. It was for the good of men generally that Israel should enter in. It was for the welfare of the generations to come that these idolatrous Canaanites should be rooted out. This nucleus of idolatry must be broken up and scattered, for the sake of the future world. A nation worshipping God, and making way for the Saviour, must be planted here instead. Such is the plan of the Gospel. It is for no caste of bishops or priests. Individuals and classes are mere items in the great account of humanity. It is for no denominations, as such. The Gospel is "Peace *on earth*, and good will *towards men.*" Oh for the day when men will take larger views of the love of God! Amid the profound mysteries of one elect nation we have revealed in exceeding clearness the Gospel-spirit of God's love to the whole human race.

## SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 1, 2. Instead of looking at the passage in its connection with both Moses and Joshua, it may be taken in relation to the call of the latter only, shewing thus Jehovah's selection of human instruments. **I. God's choice of men for His service has regard to temperament and disposition.** Joshua's military instincts (Ex. xxxii. 17); his boldness and firmness; his unselfishness (chap. xix. 49, 50); his power of personal influence (chap. xxiv. 31). **II. God's choice has regard to previous training.** Joshua had been for forty years a responsible leader and ruler (Ex. xvii. 9, 10; Num. xiii. 2, 3, 8). **III. God's choice has regard to past character.** Joshua had been zealous for God's honour. He had shewn holy faith. He and Caleb had stood alone confronting the people. Milton's Abdiel—"Among the faithless." Bk. V. **IV. God's choice has regard to the work to be accomplished.** To eject the Canaanites, a soldier was needed. For the Pentecostal sermon, impetuous Peter is chosen; for the great mission in Asia Minor and Southern Europe, ardent Paul; for the testimony on the plain of Dura, the three inflexible Hebrews; for winning the favour of Artaxerxes, the devout, yet courtly Nehemiah. The man and the emergency must correspond. Omnipotence never chooses to waste itself on human awkwardness. God cements things that fit. The man who is inapt has need to pray for the Divine training of himself ere he can expect the Divine blessing on his work.

1. Whom the Lord calls He also qualifies. 2. Where He entrusts men with authority, He procures them respect. 3. Where He sends them into conflict, He secures them victory. 4. Where he gives them victory, He intends them to take possession.

"1. He that was here called to honour had been long bred to business. Our Lord Jesus Himself took upon Him the form of a servant, and then God highly exalted Him. 2. Those are fittest to rule that have learnt to obey. 3. He that was to succeed Moses was intimately acquainted with him."

"Well doth Joshua succeed Moses. The very acts of God of old were allegories. Where the law ends, there the Saviour begins. We may see the land of promise in the law: only Jesus, the Mediator of the New Testament, can bring us into it." [*Bp. Hall.*]

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 3—9.

"SERVING THE LORD."

In the service of God—

**I. There is no honour without work.** Joshua is placed at the head of the host, not merely to be a chief, but a leader. "Every place" must be won. Israel must go up against each. The sole of the foot must tread, and that often in the tramp of battle, wherever the people would inherit. And the man who is at their head must lead them to the war. He, too, must divide the inheritance for them. Not least, he must "meditate day and night" in the law; for how shall he secure obedience if he be ignorant of that which is to be obeyed? Leading in such a case means arduous toil, perpetual care, ceaseless interest, and unrest. There can be no honour in the mere position. Idleness there would be simply exalted shame and prominent disgrace. It is always thus. The height of our position is the measure either of our honour or dishonour, according to the work done. High position is vantage ground for work, not rest. It is so *socially*, *ecclesiastically*, *mentally*, and *even morally*. He who climbs high in order to lie down, only exposes his slothfulness. He may lie more quietly in altitudes which the din of honest labour does not reach; for all that, he is simply a conspicuous sluggard. **II. There is no work without encouragement.** The whole passage is emphatic with promise. Wherever God gives arduous duties, He supplies bright hopes. Probably there is no position in which humanity ever stood, saving

that of impenitence and persistent sin, which has not its own specific illumination in the Scripture promises. The day has its sun, the night its moon and stars, and even the arctic zone its aurora borealis. God's love has beams of light strong enough to reach every spot in that part of the sphere of moral being where His name is had in reverence. Scripture has light for the darkness of penitence, of labour, of suffering in all its forms, of bereavement, and of death. 1. Our gloom and darkness are not essentials of life. He who supposes they are must begin by assuming the light of Divine encouragement to be insufficient. 2. Our gloom and darkness are not desirable. They cannot be; God has sought to remove them in every form. 3. Our gloom and darkness are of our own choosing. Our Heavenly Father has provided light for all who seek light, and invites all to walk therein. 4. Our gloom and darkness are harmful and sinful. They prevent our work, discourage others, shew our neglect of the Bible, or they shew that reading and meditating we do not believe. **III. There is no encouragement apart from obedience.** (Verses 7, 9.) In the sphere of moral life wicked men always walk opposite to the Sun of righteousness, and thus are ever in the night. In order to be strong for conflict, Joshua is to be strong in the comfort of hope; in order to be strong in hope, he is to be strong in obedience. 1. He who disobeys the precepts has no right to the promises. It is as though a child should steadfastly ignore his father's wishes, and then presume upon his unrestrained gifts and his undiminished love. 2. He who disobeys the precepts lacks the spirit which alone can use the promises. Lax obedience shews lax faith, and promise yields its value only to trust. Lax obedience shews lax interest, and no man can really delight where he is careless. **IV. There can be no sufficient obedience without meditation.** (Verse 8.) We are responsible, not only to do what we know, but to know what there is to be known. The ambassador who refused to open the despatches of his government would plead ignorance in vain. When Nelson shut his eye against his admiral's signal, he was none the less guilty of disobedience. Men may neglect to read the Scriptures, and then say, "I knew not that I transgressed," but the very ignorance which they plead is an aggravated form of guilt. God complains of Ephraim, "I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing." **V. There can be no satisfactory meditation which does not centre in God Himself.** (Verse 9.) "Have not I commanded thee?" We must look through the written word up to God, whom it is meant to reveal. We must look through all revelation on to Him. The Bible is light on God. The miracles of Christ are not recorded to excite wonder, they are to reveal God. It is possible to make Gethsemane, the Lord's Supper, and even the Cross so many superstitions. The brazen serpent became a relic at which men stopped, rather than a memory through which they went on to God. Hezekiah did holy work, then, to break it in pieces, and to call it "Nehushtan." If Christ be not risen again, even Calvary is worthless; "Your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." Gethsemane, the Supper, the Cross, are only good as they reveal the finished atonement and love of the living Saviour, and through Him the pardon and love of God. Riddling all superstitions of mere Bible-reading and formal religion through and through, the living Son of God looks down from heaven, and says to Saul of Tarsus, "That they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified BY FAITH THAT IS IN ME." (Acts xxvi. 18.) Faith is to be in the living Christ, not in cold duties and dead things. Trench has somewhere said, "Our blessedness is that Christ does not declare to us a system, and say, 'This is the truth;' so doing He might have established a school: but He points to a person, even to Himself, and says, 'I am the Truth;' and thus He founded, not a school, but a Church, a fellowship which stands in its faith upon a person, not in its tenure of a doctrine, or at least upon this only in a sense which is mediate and secondary."

## *SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 3—5. GOD'S SUFFICIENT PROMISES.

**I. They reveal their value only as far as we use them.** Where men tread, there shall they inherit. This can only be known by going on in the strength of them. Each says, like its Divine Author, "Prove me now herewith." **II. They have respect to all preceding promises.** "As I said unto Moses." "Vested interests." No one promise ignores the property which men may have in another. Christ destroyed nothing of the O. T. Scriptures; He fulfilled them. Nowhere so much as on and around the cross do we read the words, "That the Scripture might be fulfilled." **III. They have regard to all that which might weaken and limit them from without.** (Verse 4.) The boundary had military fitness. Strasbourg and Metz. God loves to give so that we can hold. A Christian with only penitence, only humility, only zeal, must ever be weak, —too weak to stand. He who sets foot on the whole circle of the graces, and inherits them all, has not only a broader and richer possession, but a more secure. **IV. They are not merely general, but personal.** "Before thee." They are each for all the people, all for each of the people, and most for him who most needs them. **V.** They are as continuous as human want. "All the days of thy life." As good on week-days as on Sundays; and on sad days as on days of song. Good for all kinds of days, to the end of our days. **VI. They are made clear by illustration, and thrice blessed by precedent.** "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." So of all in the Scriptures. Somebody has tried and proved each of them. The increasing value of the Scriptures. The interest of man's experience is ever accumulating on the capital of the written word. The Bible is richer to-day than it ever was before. **VII. They have their foundation and worth in the Divine character.** "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."

Verse 5. **I. God's presence gives perpetual and unvarying victory.** Any man may conquer, who fights with the Lord on his side. Victory is then as sure in one place as in another. Pharaoh, Red Sea, Wilderness, or Canaanites,—it matters not which, nor when. **II. God's presence is given irrespective of everything but sin. 1.** Irrespective of ability, disposition, or temperament. Men choose their companions in view of traits of character. God walks with all who fear Him. Variety in O. T. prophets. So the apostles. **2.** Irrespective of social condition and particular circumstances. The various instances under which this same promise was given: To Jacob, the outcast (Gen. xxviii. 15); to "the church in the wilderness" (Deut. xxxi. 6); to Joshua as well as Moses; to Solomon, the king, in his work of building the temple (1 Chron. xxviii. 20); to "the poor and needy" (Isa. xli. 17); to the persecuted Hebrew Christians (Heb. xiii. 5). **III. God's presence once given is intended to be given for ever.** The doctrine is full of consolation—should be as fully received as it is absolutely stated—must be carefully guarded from presumption. He who reverently listens to the cry of Saul, "The Lord is departed from me," or marks with Christian spirit the pitiable weakness of Samson, who "wist not" that he was in like manner left to himself in his deliberate sinfulness, will not rashly blindfold himself with a creed.

"To be forsaken of God implies utter loneliness, utter helplessness, utter friendlessness, utter hopelessness, and unutterable agony."—*Met. Tab. Pulpit*, v. 8., pp. 603—605.

"Joshua was sensible how far he came short of Moses in wisdom and grace; but what Moses did was done by virtue of the presence of God with him. Joshua, though he had not always the same presence of mind that Moses had, yet if he had always the same presence of God, would do well enough." "What Joshua had himself encouraged the people with long ago (Num. xiv. 9), God here encourageth him with."

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 6—9.

### THE CHARACTER AND SPHERE OF COURAGE.

These words are principally about courage. Joshua would both need it, and need to shew it, in leading the Israelites into the land of their inheritance. *God graciously braces men where they are most liable to fail.* It was in this matter of courage that the people had given way already. (Numb. xiii. 26—33; xiv. 1—10.) So Jehovah mercifully strengthens them in their weak place. It is thus that our Father deals with us all through the Bible. He does not fortify us where we are strong, but on the side where our strength is small. Thus Christ dealt with Peter. An earthly parent warns his child of what he knows to be dangers. So God speaks to us. Wherever we come, then, to a warning in the Scriptures, let us remember that it indicates a weakness. It is no mere spiritual talk. Danger lies there. The warning comes from Him whose eye sees farther down the line of our life than we can; and to go heedlessly on means collision, disaster, wounding, and possibly death. *God has regard to the bearing of men personally.* Napoleon's oversight of men in battle is said to have been remarkable. It is with the infinite discernment of omniscience that the King of kings watches His people, and says to them individually, "I will be with thee." *God specially marks the leaders of His people.* No officer must fail. Faint-heartedness in them would be doubly a sin. **I. God would have courage to occupy a large place in our characters and lives.** It is to cover all the ground, whithersoever we go. 1. Courage is to lead us up to all conflicts that are duties. Joshua is to go against Jericho, whose people have shut themselves within their walls, in fear; against the five confederate kings, to rescue the Gibeonites; against each of the remaining kings. But courage is not to run to foolhardiness; it is to march only in the path of duty. It had nothing to do with revenging itself on old foes in Egypt, or in anticipating future enemies on the other side of the Euphrates.

> "A valiant man
> Ought not to undergo or tempt a danger,
> But worthily, and by selected ways."—*B. Jonson.*

It is folly that braves the field to which duty makes no call. True courage—courage that said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished," said also, "When ye pray, say . . . . Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Yet courage never falters before work which ought to be done. Hougomont or Alma, Abyssinia or Ashantee, it matters not which. 2. Courage is to help us to endure when reverses and suffering come. When, through Achan's sin, the Israelites were driven back at Ai, "the hearts of the people melted, and became as water." There are many places in life where soldiers of the cross must be tried by defeat as well as by difficulties. The struggle for maintenance. Family and social reverses. The moral conflict, in which we are to be found "striving against sin." The spiritual warfare, in which, in holy communion, we are to seek to win our way into the presence and mind of Christ. **II. God would see us courageous, because no courage is the same thing as no faith, and "without faith it is impossible to please Him."** Almost all who profess religion have the faith of a creed. They believe in certain doctrines. They have, more or less fully outlined, a theological idea of the way to heaven. It is well; but all this is a very small part of what God requires when He asks for our faith. The faith which He seeks is faith in Himself, as always being with His servants to help them; it is faith in His watchfulness, His presence, His love, His purpose, His power; it is faith in victory everywhere through Himself. That is the faith which Jehovah asks, as He sends the Israelites forward to inherit. Probably many will be surprised by-and-by to discern how little God cares for the faith which strives after some particular definition of a creed, rather than after what an apostle calls "the faith of Him." It is against poor trust, not against bad definitions, that the Bible is full of such urgent remonstrance. Does not the

Lord allow as much room for definitions as for dispositions? Caleb and Joshua might differ in their understanding of the Passover, or the exact meaning of the service on the Great Day of Atonement; I do not think God would much mind, providing the creed of neither shewed distrust of Him. The Holy Spirit inspires Paul, and also James. No man would care much if, when his child grew up, she differed from him in his views of gardening or poetry; but it would be real pain to him should she doubt his word. There are some creeds which must dishonour God. The denial of the Saviour's divinity shews distrust of God simply on a point of difficulty in comprehension. Praying to images, or to dead Christians through them, is as though a child were to fear failure if it should ask a favour of its parent in person, and were to get a servant to make the entreaty instead. It is the distrust which wounds. There are places where creeds may become fatal, yet not fatal as a matter of discernment and definition, but fatal in their utter want of trust in the Lord. They present the most astounding of all paradoxes—doubt of God formulated into a religion, and then offered as worship. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." When we are tempted to do wrong by the promise of great gain, can we remember God and dare to be true? When temptation promises present pleasure, can we remember our Father's warnings and better promises, and be firm to deny ourselves? When called to lose our best-loved friends or children, can we look into the awful darkness, and rest in His words about their happiness and our own profit? When bidden to teach, or preach, or live the Gospel in the face of bitter enemies who far outnumber us, can we hear Him say, "Lo, I am with you alway," and dare to go on as in the company of that overwhelming majority into which His presence ever multiplies even our solitude? That is the kind of creed about which God so incessantly enquires in the Scriptures. He says almost nothing—perhaps nothing at all—about definitions which touch the judgment without necessarily involving the heart. Instead of always translating "trust" into "faith," as we go forward to inherit, it may be well if we sometimes render it in this old thought of "courage." "Have courage in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Repent ye, and have courage in the gospel." "Lord, increase our courage." "Have courage in God." **III. Though God desires courage in us all, fear has its proper sphere, and often does holy work.**

> "The brave man is not he who feels no fear,
> For that were stupid and irrational;
> But he whose noble soul its fear subdues,
> And bravely dares the danger nature shrinks from.
> As for your youth whom blood and blows delight,
> Away with them! there is not in their crew
> One valiant spirit."—*Joanna Baillie.*

God never intended that we should feel no fear. We are to fear and distrust ourselves. We are to fear danger as something beyond our own strength. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And we are to "work out our own salvation in fear and trembling." But all fear, as we look within, is to be stayed in courage as we look up to God. The sin is in giving way when we have omnipotence and infinite love for a defence. No man, then, should say, "I fear," and let that drive him to fear which is yet deeper. **IV. Courage, to bring honour to God, must always be courage for the right and the true.** 1. Men admire courage in the abstract. Prize-fighting has drawn multitudes. The mere soldier is sometimes not distinguished from the lofty patriot. Thus, perhaps, the mistake concerning Milton's Satan, in "Paradise Lost." Some critics have complained that Satan is the hero of the work. That is to forget that courage, in itself, is not truly worthy of admiration. Fowls, sheep, bulls, wild beasts, also have courage, and fight unto death. 2. God loves courage only when it is prompted by truth and righteousness. Such courage He always has honoured, and will honour: Daniel; the apostles before the Sanhedrim; Paul. It is said that the King of France summoned the Prince de Condé before him, giving him his choice

of three things: "Go to mass, die, or be imprisoned for life." Said the Prince, "With regard to the first, I am fully determined never to go to mass; as to the other two, I am so perfectly indifferent that I leave the choice to your Majesty." We are not called to martyrdom, nor even to imprisonment for the truth's sake; possibly if our apprehension of sin were always what it should be, we should find that whatever courage death might need, life requires even more.

Instead of discoursing on the topic of the passage, the verses may be taken as shewing—

THE HONOUR, THE INFLUENCE, AND THE SOURCE OF TRUE COURAGE.

**I. The honour which is put upon courage by God.** 1. He makes the servant who has courage in Himself His own constant companion. "The Lord thy God is with thee withersoever thou goest." 2. He makes the servant who has courage the subject of His peculiar teaching. The entire passage is a special instruction to the man who has already so valiantly, before his fellows, shewn himself afraid to distrust God. Thus "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." 3. He makes the servant who has courage the instrument of fulfilling His covenant. "The land which I sware unto their fathers, thou shalt divide." 4. He makes the servant who has courage a blessing and a joy to his fellows. Joshua should lead them into the land: instrumentally, their homes and future possessions should come to them from his bravery and his fidelity to God. **II. The influence which is conceded to courage by men.** All men own its power 1. Courage loses no favourable opportunity to begin warfare; fear would miss many an opening. 2. Courage appals its foes before it smites them: it thus needs only half the strength of timidity. The arm which resists it is already feeble by reason of fear. 3. Courage seizes all advantages which are offered in the conflict. Fear is blind, and, till too late, overlooks them. 4. Courage gives no opportunity to the defeated foe to rally. Fear happens to win the day, and sits down surprised and contented, talking of valour. The conflict has to be fought over afresh, and it may be that the battle is then lost. 5. Courage is imperial in itself, and must reign. However it may be with the Graces of the ancient classics, the Scripture graces were all "born in purple." Love conquers everywhere. Patience presently wins the day. Humility may seem of lowlier mien, but "The meek shall inherit the earth," and "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Hope, always aspiring, enters already "within the veil." As to courage, "To him that believeth, all things are possible." **III. The strength which courage draws from the Scriptures.** 1. To neglect the Bible is to prepare the way for fear and trembling. (*a*) There can be no sufficient courage without light, and the Bible is "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path." The awe which comes from darkness. (*b*) There can be no sufficient courage without confidence of being right, and the Bible assures the just man. The hesitation which comes from uncertainty. (*c*) There can be no sufficient courage without love, and our love is born of knowing the love of God. (*d*) There can be no sufficient courage without hope, and he who neglects the Bible can have no satisfactory ground of hope. 2. It is not enough to have the Bible, it must be used. (*a*) The courage that comes from speaking the truth to others: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth." (*b*) The courage that comes from meditation in the truth: "Thou shalt meditate therein day and night." (*c.*) The courage that comes from doing the truth: "That thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein."

THE THREEFOLD ALLIANCE;—GOD, LAW, MAN.—*Verse* 8 *only.*

I. The law of the Scriptures is one with physical law, and he who obeys the Scriptures has physical law for an ally. All life is against that man who is against the Bible; all life is for the man who is obedient to the Bible. Suppose the laws which touch our health worked just the other way; what a curse law

would be! Think of drunkenness, lust, crime, and all manner of debauchery as contributing to physical health and gladness; what a world this would become! But law is on the side of godliness, and he who walks with the Bible may sing with Paul, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." **II. The law of the Scriptures is in harmony with the law of conscience, and he who obeys the Scriptures, in that proportion maintains his self-respect, and ultimately wins the regard of men.** 1. The relation of conscious integrity to individual bearing. (*a*) No man can respect himself, who is continually giving the lie to his own sense of right. (*b*) No man can lose his conscious integrity without proportionately suffering in moral dignity. By so much as he is dishonest to the distinctive feature of his manhood, by so much does he become a mere animal. He cannot stand in the same moral dignity before his fellows. He feels his humiliation. 2. The relation of an honest life to individual influence. Not only does the man who is dishonest to himself feel less before his fellows, but they see him for what he is. The weakness may be too successfully concealed by artifice or habit to awaken reflection, but the measure of every man's moral worth is more or less accurately comprehended by his companions. They may not reason on it; they must apprehend it. Moral life is so much moral light, and the heart of our neighbour feels whether or not it is illuminated in our presence. The earth never mistakes the moon for the sun by shewing daylight at night-time. If the light in us be darkness or merely artifice, our fellow-men cannot be much or long deceived by the imposition. Thus, human sin notwithstanding, the world has ever owned her worthiest sons most proudly. The Pope may do as he will; the world, in her general conscience, and in her history, seldom canonises any but her saints. It is the good man who has "good success." He may not be placed in the Calendar till after his death, but society seldom fails ultimately to correct her temporary errors. Socrates may live thinking that he has only earned hemlock, he may write never a chapter to perpetuate his name, men will be true to his manhood for all that.

Conscience, however, needs the light and encouragement of God's law to keep it in activity. Scripture is the only fireproof in which conscience can enwrap itself to prevent being seared into unfeeling callousness by the burnings of surrounding and inward sin. Thus law and conscience, together, make way for good success in the inheritance which is moral and social. **III. The law of the Scriptures is the mind of God, and he who keeps ever with the law is always where God stoops to whisper, "I am with thee."** When God established His commandments in the earth, He bade law, both in the physical and moral worlds, be on the side of goodness. From that day to this, law has never sided with the sinner. But though much of God's help of His children is through law, this is by no means His only method. He adds His direct blessings, and gives His direct help to the obedient. Nothing is written more emphatically in Scripture than this. The deliverance from Egypt, the miracles of the wilderness, the walls of Jericho falling without any cause in ordinary law; the histories given by Samuel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, and other prophets, are full of incidents of Jehovah's direct interposition. The Psalms tell us of the angels that encamp about them that fear the Lord, and both the Old and New Testaments often shew them coming to the guidance, or comfort, or help of the godly. The cross, most emphatically of all, tells of help other than by the automatic method of law, to which modern scientists would tie us. True discipleship not only finds Christ, and cries with Nathanael, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God;" it hears Christ reply of the earthly future, "Hereafter thou shalt see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." The eyes of the obedient see an open heaven even while yet on earth, and life everywhere becomes all but sentient with God. "If God" so "be for us, who can be against us?" Thus does our Father guarantee "good success."

## SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 6. God never tells us to be strong without helping us to be strong. To encourage His servant to begin this vast work and dreadful war, God shews him how all should end. "Thou shalt divide the land."

Verse 7. No man's dignity, however great, frees him in any measure from absolute obedience to the Scriptures. Joshua must obey in all things, turning neither "to the right hand nor to the left." Error and sin do not lie merely on one side of the way of truth, but on both: the path of holy obedience is the *via media*.

"As the soldier of an earthly leader is to act in all things according to certain rules laid down in a code drawn up for the purpose, so the Christian soldier has his code drawn up for him by God Himself, and revealed to him in the oracles of truth. This code he is to study with diligence, that he may conform himself to it in every particular. This will require all the courage that any man can possess."

Verse 8. "Thou shalt have thy heart so constantly imbued with the letter and spirit of the law, that thy mouth shall, as it were, overflow with its rich contents, as 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' The same phrase occurs but once elsewhere in the Scriptures."

"The Heb. term for 'meditate' implies that mental kind of rumination which is apt to vent itself in an audible sound of voice." [*Bush.*]

Verse 9. The interrogative form of the first clause, so far from suggesting doubt, is expressive of the strongest possible emphasis.

Our Lord continually assured Himself that He had kept the word and followed the will of the Father (cf. John v. 30; vi. 38). He may even be said to encourage Himself in the thought of His obedience to the will of God. The prayer in John xvii. seems full of the comfort of conscious obedience. If the Saviour found this thought grateful and refreshing to Him, how needful is it that we in our weakness shall never stand where we cannot strengthen ourselves by saying, "Has not God commanded me in this thing? Is not the Father with me in His will, as well as by His presence?"

"The Lord never demands anything of men without giving them a promise in return." [*Keil.*]

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 10, 11.

### The Gifts of God.

Some gifts we possess already, as the Israelites did the manna; how are they to influence us? Some gifts are as yet only promised, as the land of Canaan was to Israel; how are we to regard them? Some gifts are not promised at all, excepting by implication, as strength and help to cross the Jordan in the face of a warlike foe. How far may we go onward, depending on promises which are not written, but merely implied? In a word, what influence are the gifts of God which we do possess, the gifts which through promise we hope to possess, and the gifts which though not specified in any promise we absolutely require, to exert on us in our daily life? How far may we relax personal efforts, and rest in mercies which we have, because we have them? How far may we look on promised mercies, and go on in the strength of them, as though they were in hand already? Yet again, in what measure may we reckon that our very necessities guarantee to us the help of our heavenly Father, even where no actual promise defines some visible emergency before us? These are some aspects of a great question, about which, and through Joshua, God is here seen impressing His mind on the early and plastic life of this young nation. The principles of the teaching

are deep, and important, and wide-reaching. **I. The gifts of God are to be held with a wise regard to the surroundings of our life.** "Prepare you victuals." But the the manna was yet falling (chap. v. 12): probably the people had gathered of it that very morning. Here they are told to prepare other food, perhaps of the corn and cattle already taken as spoil in the border-land. Would not the manna do for the next three days? No. Joshua the soldier looks on, and sees that in the marching and closer massing of the people, their enemies moreover being near at hand, there will be no opportunity and no time for this usual occupation. Joshua the prophet may know that the manna is soon to cease, and be preparing the people for their new form of life. Joshua the godly man sees that other supplies can be obtained now, and seems to be emphatically saying, "Do not depend idly on food from heaven, now that you are where your own arms can serve you in gathering the supplies of earth. In the wilderness your own toil could do nothing; here it can. 'Prepare you victuals.'" Prepare, *for you must*, on account of the marching order necessary in front of your foes; prepare, *for you can*, as you have spoil by you; prepare, *for you ought to*, God's gifts being never bestowed to supersede your own efforts. 1. *When we rest on God's help, we should know for what times and for what places in our life that help has been promised.* Even God has no manna for fat lands. Some food and some kinds of help are only for life in the desert. Christian people sometimes try their faith by praying for things and by expecting things that God will probably never give them. (*a*) Sometimes men stand in fertile places, and plead promises which were meant only for help in a wilderness. Think of a man free from trial pleading Isaiah xli. 10, 13, 17, 18, and saying, "I want to feel that, to hear God's voice thus, and to see such wonders of His love and power." Men pray in fruitful lands for help which is good only for the desert, and then, when prayer is unanswered, think the promises are vague. It is we who are vague. The martyrs, the reformers, the very poor, the terribly tempted, may ask and get help that would curse other Christians. Our expectation of God's gifts should be appropriate. (*b*) Sometimes earnest men cry out for visible interpositions of God. They want some unmistakable manifestation, and "they seek after a sign." So long as their outcry is after God, they think it must be scriptural. But God gives visions only in the night-time; the old prophets had them, but think of the terrible times in which they lived. The man who cries, "I only am left," may have an angel to speak with him in his despair; probably none will ever come to us, pray earnestly and long as we may. The cessation of miracles and signs must not be taken as an arbitrary arrangement which can no longer happen because prophets are gone and apostles are no more; the visible signs are gone because of increased light, and not because of extinct apostles. What we *can bear*, it is best we *should bear*. It is to Mary Magdalene in her simple, ardent, absorbing love, and her unquestioning faith, that the Saviour says, "Touch me not." The other women in the same hour may hold Him by the feet, and worship Him; to the timid ten Christ will say, the same evening, "Handle me and see;" to the doubter the same pitying compassion will say, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands," etc.; to Mary, whose greater love is as greater light, Christ virtually says, "Future contact with me is to be spiritual, and you can best bear to first learn this hard lesson." It is as our day is that we may look for our strength to be. Thus we should "Rejoice in the Lord always," whether the signs of His presence with us are great or not. Suppose Israel had said in the days of Gideon, "God cannot be with us as He was with our fathers; manna does not fall for us as it did for them;" the answer would have been, "You are not in the wilderness." It does not follow that God is not with us, because we cannot see so much of Him as some one else has seen, or does see. Spurgeon, and Müller, the heavily bereaved, and the very poor, need a measure of help which might hinder many. 2. *True piety will consider how far God's promises and gifts are practicable.* The manna was a very elastic gift. It was always

sufficient for necessity, would not bear accumulation in the week, and yet kept wholesome over the Sabbath. But even the manna was unsuitable for a march in front of an enemy. Do not Christians sometimes plead for gifts which in the very nature of things, they could not have? 3. Then the question of need comes up in this other light—*How far* CAN *we do to-morrow without the things which we really need to-day?* It will curse us to possess as a gift what we can get from our own labour. Manna in Canaan would have tended to make a fertile land not only as the wilderness, but worse. Think of decaying vegetation. In the miracles of the Saviour, Divine power never undertakes to do what human hands could accomplish. Men can fill the six waterpots with water; gather the loaves and fishes already in possession of some in the multitude; roll away the stone from the grave of Lazarus. That which men can do, Christ will not do for them. Superhuman help only begins where human power fails. **II. The gifts which God's people have had should assure them concerning all other gifts which they really need, whether these are promised or not.** "In three days ye *shall pass over* this Jordan." It does not appear that at this time Joshua had received any specific promise of help for the passage. That came later; chap. iii. 7, 8. How, then, was this mighty host to cross a deep and rapid river? They knew nothing of pontoon bridges, and had no engineers. How were they to cross if their warlike enemies should dispute the passage? Who could say that the Canaanites would not defend this watery pass? If they would fight anywhere, surely here, where "the swellings of Jordan" would help them. Spartans fight desperately at Thermopylæ; and Britons off Dover go even into the sea to get vantage blows at the bearers of Cæsar's eagles. There seems to have been no promise yet about the passage of the Jordan. Faith reads enough of help in the very necessity, and says with unwavering words, "Ye shall pass over." 1. *All our actual need is to be referred to the heart and character of God.* God's heart and arm have each a history; the one, of gracious kindness, the other of invincible power. It is because of what God is, and because of being in the way of God's commandments, that Joshua is able to speak so confidently of making the other shore in so short a time. 2. *To the godly man, not only the letter of the law, but the letter of the promises also, is ever superseded by the spirit.* There seems to be no declaration that the manna shall cease, and yet Joshua says, "Prepare ye victuals." We read of no promise which certifies a passage within three days, nevertheless he says, "Ye shall pass over." 3. *Our sweetest readings of God's love and of the Scriptures are often the outcome of our greatest emergencies.* But for our wildernesses and rivers and enemies, our lives would have been without many a rich strain which we could have learned nowhere else. The Jews in Babylon cried, "How shall we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?" They might not be able to do that, but they learned many a new one there which made sweet music for them and for others after their return home. Some one has said of our poets—

"They learn in suffering what they teach in song,"

and it is much the same with the Church of God. But for the wilderness, and the Jordan, and the Canaanites, we had never had this rich reading of trust and holy fear. Here is fear thinking of hunger, and saying, "Prepare you victuals; for although the manna falls now, you must not depend on God for food when you can get it yourselves;" and here, too, is faith, which says, "Though the river be wide and deep, and the enemy may be fierce and numerous, and no actual promise bridges the difficulty, within three days ye shall pass over." Let these God-taught men of the old world teach us. Let them cheer us with their unquestioning and yet suspicious trust.

"Mortal! they softly say,
Peace to thy heart.
We too, yes, mortal,
Have been as thou art:



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Hope-lifted, doubt-depressed,
Seeing in part;
Tried, troubled, tempted,
Sustained as thou art."

**III. All our temporal gifts from God belong to us, at most, for this life only.** The manna was not even for a lifetime, and the land was only given to them for as long as they could "*possess it.*" When death took away the power of possessing this gift of God, it could be theirs no longer. That is the tenure of all our earthly holdings. Men try to hold and control their earthly estates for generations after they are gone. The law of entail and primogeniture; curious wills; trust deeds for charitable and religious purposes. The "pious founder" of the past is perpetually hampering the action of pious men in the present. Some trust-restrictions may be and must be made; but surely it is hardly right to tie down a future generation to matters of detail suggested to us by our probably poorer light. If a Christian man is subject to the accident of wealth during his life, is he therefore at liberty to provide *a detailed creed* for thousands for the next ten or twenty generations? In any case, our earthly holdings must soon be laid down. They are only ours while we can possess them. Are we holding them wisely, and for God? Have we any possession in Christ Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners? That inheritance only can we hold for ever.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 12—18.

### Unequal Possessions and Corresponding Obligations.

Several religious writers recently have called attention to the "Gospel" in the O. T. Some books have been thought to shadow forth much of the doctrinal teachings of the Gospel, others, the glory of the Church. "Christ in Leviticus" is set forth typically; in other books, prophetically. The Gospel in Joshua is a Gospel of right feeling about daily life. It is a system of Christian ethics, and the teaching is the same in outline as the teaching of the Saviour and His apostles. Here are insisted on the same obedience towards God, and the same duty towards men, which are made so emphatic by Jesus Christ. One glory of the Bible is that all which is new is so old. Nothing of the O. T. is recalled in the New; nothing is amended, nothing is altered. Not a jot or a tittle of the old principles passes away. The clothing of them may change, but Christ says of the truths, "I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." The O. T. shews us a plant; in the N. T. we have the same plant developed amid the glories of the work of Christ into blossom and beauty; now and here the centuries are bearing fruits, and yonder these are being gathered home; but the plant has been ever the same. The Hindoos teach the doctrine of transmigration of souls. A man dies, and they say he may become an elephant, then a bird, then an alligator, then a tiger, then a serpent, and so on through various and endless forms of being; but with all these changes of body, they insist that the soul is always one and identical. Revelation may come now in one form, and now in another; it may be given now by this man, and now by that; the body may change,—the spirit of the Bible is ever the same. This paragraph speaks of the inequalities of human inheritances; of the obligation of opportunity; and of the duty of caring for the weak. **I. Men, by God's appointment, come into life's inheritance in differing measures and by various ways.** The whole army of Israel had gone up against Sihon and Og. (Cf. Numb. xxi. 21—35; Deut. ii. 24—37; iii. 1—17.) These marvellous victories thrilled the heart of the nation, and animated its songs for *at least* four centuries. (Cf. Ps. cxxxv. 2, 11, 12, 21; cxxxvi. 17—21.) Yet the two and a half tribes inherited the whole of the land

on the east of Jordan. Reuben and Gad had a preponderance of cattle. (Cf Numb. xxxii. 1.) How did that inequality of possession come about? Perhaps through greater industry, or more agricultural habits. This inequality of cattle led to the two and a half tribes inheriting this fat and fertile land, which *all Israel* had fought to conquer. Here was another irregularity. There were yet others. The number of men upwards of twenty years of age was in Reuben, 43,700, in Gad, 40,500; in half Manasseh, 26,350. Manasseh, though fewest by far in population, had an immensely larger territory than either of the others. Gad numbered less than Reuben, yet its territory was nearly double. Looking at the plan of the land in ordinary maps, the case, in rough figures, stands nearly as follows:—Where a Reubenite inherited one acre, a Gadite would possess two, while a member of the half-tribe of Manasseh would have nearly fifteen. How this brings abruptly into view our heavenly Father's method of disposing of His gifts. Men would say—at least, many poor men, and not a few others—"Let every man have things equally." Their panacea for the ills which afflict the world is an equal division of the world's substance. God does not even start His model nation on that plan. To one tribe He gives no territorial property whatever, and to this half-tribe, which is only as the fourth of the sons of Joseph, He gives by far the largest acreage of all. And why not? "Because of justice," men say. Well, if all things were equalised to-day, they would begin to get uneven again to-morrow. The industrious and able would gain; the idle and dissolute would lose. And why talk of justice where there are no rights? The parable of the labourers in the vineyard disposes for ever of this question. The rights of rebels and traitors are not usually thought large among men. Besides this, our life on earth is a system of training and discipline, and our God does not govern by a routine method of equal pleasures and equal pains. 1. *Glance at the differing lots of different men now.* (*a*) Look at men in their birth. Life is a race, and much depends on the start. Do men start equally? "Some men are born to greatness, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." Some are born in mansions, and some in hovels; some of godly parents, and some in the midst of vice; some in civilised countries, and some of barbarians; some with good mental powers, and some idiots; some with a well-balanced emotional nature, and some with passions which might need an angel to control them. (*b*) There is the same diversity in providence. Some of even the slothful rise to riches, and some of even the industrious never know prosperity. One farmer's corn is blighted, or his cattle are carried off by an epidemic; another, of far less merit, succeeds. One merchant suffers continually by fires, or storms, or markets which seem always adverse; another, not nearly so worthy, is continually meeting with prosperity. You can only look at it all, and say, "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich." (*c*) There is the same inequality in religious privileges. Some are so taught, and trained, and pleaded with, and prayed for, that they seem carried to heaven by the force of Divine grace in others; some are so taught, and tempted, and constrained, that they seem borne as on a flood tide to destruction. Some live long, and have many opportunities to repent; others do but get fairly into years of responsibility, and suddenly they die. These are not theories; life is shewing them daily as her own stern facts. 2. *What are the reasons for these differing measures and lots in human life?* We are not omniscient, and therefore cannot tell. Not a small part of the efficiency of life's teachings lies in the demand which they make on our absolute trust in God. But "we know in part." Ask why the earth is not one level plain, with no majestic hills and no pleasant valleys. What wondrous beauty would be lost in such a dismal monotony of arrangement! Ask why all climates are not equal? why the world was not made with no Borneo and no Iceland, no Sumatra and no Siberia, but with one dead level of temperature all over? How death would reign everywhere if this were the case! With no breezes, no currents of air, no purifying winds, earth would be a scene of perpetual pestilence,

so long as any remained alive for victims. Ask why the world has not one eternal summer; why trees do not bear flower and fruit all the year round? How beautiful this would be; yes, but how enervating! What about moral health, moral strength, and moral beauty, if all men had an equal heritage and an even course in coming into possession? What, if among men, there were no hills and valleys? What if the moral climate were everywhere alike? What if perpetual summer reigned the wide world over? Oh, if there were no sore poverty and riches, no terrible bereavements and sicknesses, and no robust health, the currents of pity and charity would sink into a calm, putrid, and fatal selfishness, and compassion would stagnate and die. With some it seems already to be, "Every man for himself, and God for us all;" then it would be, "Every man for himself, and God for none of us." "No more pain and no more tears" may be well where there is "no more sin;" it could not be so here. If the heritage of all men were the same, the world's rich experiences and moral health and beauty would vanish and die for ever. Thank God for such inheritance as you have. It is an unmerited gift, to be used to His glory. **II. A common obligation rests on all men to whom God gives an easy inheritance, to help those whose lot is only won through hard work and stern conflict.** The two and a half tribes had fertile lands, and had them through the service of all Israel: now, having rest, they were to fight the battles of their brethren. God teaches the young nation that men who have rest are to help men who are in unrest and conflict. How it all reads like a verse out of the N. T. What is it but saying, "We then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves"? It is God's early version of a later proclamation, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Do we use our rest to help our brother who is yet in stern anxiety and conflict? Some men take all they can get, but give nothing to their fellows. They are like the gluttons of whom the ancient Juvenal wrote:—

> "Such whose sole bliss is eating, who can give
> But that one brutal reason why they live."

Inequalities do but exist that we may give our rest for our brother's strife. Especially should he who has entered into the rest of faith, labour for the help of him who is borne down into sin by many temptations. Feltham well said, "Shew me the man who would go to heaven alone if he could, and I will shew you the man who will never be admitted to heaven." We are to be followers of Him who, "though He was rich, for our sakes became poor," etc. **III. The weak have always been God's care, and ought ever to be ours also.** (*Ver.* 14.) God would not have their women and children exposed to the strife. He impresses the gentleness of His own heart on His people from the very outset. How beautifully this feeling of interest in the weak comes out all through the ministry of the Saviour! Why should God be so gentle with weak men? 1. *Think how useless weak people are for service.* Dr. Livingstone told us in one of his indignant letters that twenty thousand slaves were annually exported from the East Coast of Africa, but that having to walk five hundred miles, not one in five of those captured ever lived to embark. Think of it; one hundred thousand people torn every year from home to furnish an exportation of twenty thousand! What became of the eighty thousand? They became weak and sick with marching, and were driven on till they fell down to die on the road Think of it; two hundred and twenty of the weak thus driven to death every day all the year round! Oh, how differently God deals with us; and how worthless many of us are in our weakness! 2. *Remember the tendency of weakness to despondency.* The way-worn Elijah cries out in his grief, "O Lord, take away my life." 3. *Think on the tendency of men in weakness to reject their Saviour.* Notwithstanding this, Christ still cares for such. Peter, in his weakness, denies Christ, yet Christ prays for him; Thomas doubts, and his Lord says, "Reach hither thy finger;" Judas betrays his Master, but how tenderly that Master pleads with him

at the table; of the eleven Jesus prophesied, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man *to his own*, and shall leave me alone," immediately He adds concerning the long discourse in which He had ministered to their coming feebleness, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace." It is said that during his youth Themistocles was very idle, and that when he suddenly turned to a life of industry, many asked his reason for the change; the answer was, "The glory of Miltiades will not suffer me to sleep." The glory of the Lord's compassion for us in our helplessness might well awaken our dormant sympathies, and quicken our still hands to holy efforts for others who are also weak.

## *SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 12—16. THE PROMISE BETWEEN THE DEAD AND THE LIVING.

I. God ratifies, through Joshua, the covenant made between these tribes and Moses. He holds Himself bound by the word of His deceased servant, whom during his life He had so visibly recognised. The importance of the words of a man by whom the Lord is manifestly working. In a measure, God honours such words still. II. God, "who keepeth covenant" on His side, demands faithfulness from men on their part also. These tribes had made a solemn promise which they are now called upon to fulfil. (Cf. Numb. xxxii. 16—33.) 1. Vows which ought never to have been made, and which it would be sinful to perform, should be kept only with penitence and prayer. (e. g. Acts xxiii. 12.) 2. Vows which in themselves are neither evil nor good should be faithfully kept for conscience' sake. 3. Vows in which holy service is offered to God or man, God holds to be unquestionably sacred and imperatively binding. (Cf. Deut. xxiii. 21—23.) The death of one of the parties to this agreement in no measure cancels the obligation of the other. Numbers xxxii. 23, which treats of this promise, does not so much assert that sin is self-revealing as that it is self-remunerating. It ensures its own penalties; and the penalty for this broken vow should be certain and heavy. Verses 12—16 may be otherwise treated, as indicating some

INCENTIVES TO GENEROSITY.

I. Generous kindness towards others is the best policy towards ourselves. If the nine and a half tribes had been defeated, or had not made their victory sure, the two and a half tribes would speedily have suffered also. It was security for the eastern side of Jordan, that the western tribes should have rest. This is so throughout our own lives also. To help our brethren, is to lay up riches where, even for this life, "neither moth nor rust" can wholly destroy them. II. Generous kindness towards others is invariably due to others. It may be due to them because of what *they* have done for us. This was the case here. It is always due because of what *some* have done for us. What we owe to men, should be judged in the light of that which we have received from men. Thus human kindness, while always graceful, is ever a debt. III. Generous kindness towards others is due to God, and is well-pleasing in His sight. He from whom we have received all that we prize most in life, and all that we shall care for in death, graciously says about all our efforts to help needy brethren, "Ye have done it unto Me." Even Cicero could write, "Men resemble the gods in nothing so much as in doing good to their fellow-creatures." Self-interest, as a motive for action, is allowable; self-denial for the good of others is noble. Wm. Jay well said—"To render good for good is human; to render evil for evil is brutish; to render evil for good is devilish; to render good for evil is divine."

Verses 16—18. These verses, at first sight, read like the reply of the two and a half tribes; probably they should be taken as the response of all Israel to Joshua's call to war. Two addresses had been given, of which the substance

is recorded: one to the "shoterim," or subordinate officers of all Israel, and the other probably to the similar officers of the two and a half tribes. The verses read like a declaration of fealty to Joshua, made on behalf of the whole of the twelve tribes, whose officers had "passed through the host," and gathered the mind of the people, which they here formally express.

Joshua's claims on the people were made not on his own behalf, but as the representative of the mind of Jehovah. The people had been led to regard him as the medium through which God declared His will. Taken in this light the verses shew us

THE SPIRIT OF TRUE OBEDIENCE.

**I. Obedience to the will of God should be prompt and complete.** 1. True obedience will lead us to keep, not merely some, but all of the commandments. If we are really loyal to God, we shall need no exposition of that seemingly harsh word—"He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all." The spirit that can practise any one known disobedience sets itself up in opposition to God, who gave all the commandments, and who is therefore greater than them all put together. To break one command knowingly is to intentionally violate the will of God; and of what use is it to obey some of His words, and then *to dare Him* on the strength of having kept a part of His precepts? For His people there is only one thing to say—"All that Thou commandest us, directly or indirectly, we will do." 2. True obedience will lead us in all the ways of God. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies." "Whithersoever Thou sendest us, we will go." 3. True obedience loves to refresh itself with helpful memories. The Israelites had hearkened unto Moses in some things, and therein had been their greatest happiness. Where they had murmured and rebelled, there they had suffered; where they had obeyed, therein had they been blessed. They did not mean to vaunt in their obedience to Moses as perfect, but express, in this general way, their desire in all things to obey Joshua. They knew by a deep experience that this was the path of happiness. "Great peace have they which love Thy law; and nothing shall offend them." **II. The spirit of obedience to God, and the spirit of prayer and holy desire for God's people, ever go together.** 1. "The Lord be with thee, as He was with Moses." How constantly our Lord Himself shews us the close connection between the spirit of prayer and that of obedience. The key to the power of the prayer in John xvii. is given in its own words, "I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." 2. "Only be strong and of a good courage." The voice of obedience is the echo of the voice of God. These are the very words which the Lord had spoken in His charge to Joshua; here they are reiterated by the people. So God supplements His teachings by the common feeling of mankind. **III. He who best obeys God, most severely estimates the penalties due to transgression.** The disobedient, they say, "shall be put to death." This was martial law, and was certainly as necessary in an army then as it is now. Through rebellion in the wilderness there had been forty years' delay already. This is no reckless statement made in a moment of excitement, neither is it unmerciful. Severity to the few would be mercy to the multitude. It is when in the spirit of obedience that the Israelites see this. Were we more holy, we should probably have far fewer discussions on the amount of punishment due to sin. It is when we live nearest to God that we most feel the guilt of sin and its dreadful deservings. It was Murray McCheyne who talked with such awful gentleness and love of the wrath of God. Probably no angel sees any reason for wonder, much less for complaint, when he "looks into" the word to guilty men—"The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Apart from disposition and desire, *could it* be otherwise?

"THE MORAL ADVANTAGES OF GOOD ORGANIZATION. — Society must have leadership, and leadership must be a question of

competence. There are three things about the true leader which are most notable: 1. He must be directly called of God. Moses was; Joshua was. 2. Being directly called of God, he will walk constantly in the Divine counsel. 'This book of the law shall not depart,' etc. 3. Walking constantly in the Divine counsel, he shall achieve the most distinguished success. This is God's promise.

"Organization is as much required in the Church as in the army. God is not the author of confusion, but of order. Every man has a place, and ought to keep it; and if he overstep it, he should be made uncomfortable until he return. The mature thinker, the new-born Christian, the untried youth, the undisciplined mind, and the cultivated intellect, cannot be equal, and ought not to have equal authority in the Church. There are chief seats for chief guests, and lower rooms for less conspicuous men; and society should exhibit displeasure towards the man who wantonly asserts a claim to a place above the merits of his character. When this principle is recognised, we shall get good organization, and such organization will secure the following advantages:—**I. Such organization would facilitate the development of individual talent.** In the absence of wise organization, the modest man will be ignored or crushed. He will have no power and no disposition to cope with the self-asserting and blustering men who worship their own infallibility. For the moment insolence will vanquish genius, simply because genius disdains the rude weapons which insolence adopts, and cares not to fight where even victory would be disgrace. . . . **II. Such organization would consolidate the Christian society assembling in one place.** The army is a compact confederacy. Its consolidation is its strength. Break up its wisely arranged gradations, and its power is paralysed. The same principle has its bearing upon the Church. . . . . **III. Such organization would present the most formidable front to the enemy. Every man in his place, every man moving at the same word of command every man living for the common good**—let that programme be carried out, and no power can withstand the united influence of Christ's believers. Disorder is weakness; disorder is waste! The Church is to-day torn by intestine strife. Every man's hand is lifted up against his brother, and through all the ranks this question is asked, Who shall be greatest? What wonder if the enemy be laughing at our impotence, and deriding our pretensions? **IV. Such organization would promote a most healthful spiritual discipline.** The organization which God appoints is calculated to train men to habits of self-dominion. . . . . The young man is held in check; the passionate man is subdued; the lethargic man is quickened; and each nature has the advantage of association with natures of a different type. The organization thus commended is not merely mechanical; it is the order which comes of a living love, which is willing to do the most good in the least time. It is quite possible to have a perfect mechanical outline, and yet to make no impression on the age. We want all the force of individuality combined with all the regulation of order; and this we can only have by living constantly in the spirit of Jesus Christ, without which we are none of His. It may be said that life will make its own order. This is a pleasant sophism, very gratifying to an indolent spirit; but the whole history of human training gives it emphatic contradiction. It is forgotten that we have to do, not with life in the abstract, but with *fallen life;* with life under the constant influence of Satanic appeal, and which is inclined to go down rather than to go up: so that life under such conditions cannot be trusted to make its own order; it must be brought under Divine discipline, as that may discover itself in human appointments, and by serving humbly must learn to rule benignantly." [*Dr. Parker: Pulpit Analyst*, vol. i. 626.]

## CHAPTER II.

### *THE MISSION OF THE TWO SPIES.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Joshua sent**] Or, as in the margin, had sent. **It is probable that** the spies had left the camp for Jericho one or two days before the giving of the two addresses by Joshua, which are recorded in chap. i. **Out of Shittim**] Called in Numb. xxxiii. 49. Abel Shittim. The last camping ground of the Israelites in connection with their nomadic life, and the scene of their sin with Moab. (Cf. Numb. xxv.) **4. Hid them**] "Heb. 'hid him,' *i.e.* each one of them: implying, probably, that she hid them separately, at some distance from each other" (Bush). **5. The time of shutting the gate**] This was at sunset. The absence of artificial light would render this precaution necessary, especially in a time of war. **When it was dark**] As it grew dusk (De Wette). The evening twilight in the East is of very short duration. **6. Stalks of flax**] "Flax of the wood, that is, undressed flax, or flax with its ligneous parts" (Kitto). **9. Your terror is fallen upon us**] As Moses had predicted forty years before; Ex. xv. 15. **12. Give me a true token**] Rahab asks them to enter into solemn covenant with her, and to establish something as the usual token or sign. The sign of the covenant in this case was the scarlet cord named in ver. 18. **14. Our life for**

**yours**] The sentiment is, "If we fail to regard your lives as sacred, may God so fail to think of ours." It became afterwards a common form of oath in Israel. (Cf. Ruth i. 17; 1 Sam. iii. 17; xxv. 22; 1 Kings xix. 2, etc.) 16. **Get you to the mountain**] "Probably the cavernous mountain to the north of Jericho, which the Arabs now call Kuruntul" (F. R. Fay). 18. **This scarlet thread**] This crimson cord. The dye is supposed to have been made from the larvæ of the cochineal insect, called in Arabic "*kermes*," or crimson. 19. **His blood be upon us**] A common form of adjuration (Ezek. xxxiii. 4; Matt. xxvii. 25, etc.). 22. **Abode there three days**] One clear day, and part of two others. The spies were probably sent out on the sixth of Abib; on the evening of the same day as that on which they arrived at Jericho they escaped to the mountain; they waited in hiding there throughout the next day, and through the night and the day and the greater part of the night following, when they returned to Joshua, and made their report.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1—7.

### Emergencies in the Life of Piety.

1. Here was an emergency to Joshua and all the people. They were on the eve of a bloody and terrible war. Omnipotence and Omniscience had guaranteed success; how far were jealous precautions and earnest efforts on the part of men to be coupled with the promised help of God? Joshua had to choose between idle trust and active co-operation. 2. Equally eventful is this same period to Rahab. Her newly found faith in God was tried hard in its very beginnings. She had to choose between her country and her newly discovered God; she chose God, and chose rightly. She had also to choose between telling a lie and giving up the spies; she chose the lie, and thus sinned. We see here, faith working to ensure a victory which God has already promised; faith choosing between a country on the one hand, and God on the other; and faith mixed with sin, and God graciously over-ruling the sin for the good of men. **I. The relation between man's efforts and God's guarantees.** "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you," said God to His servant Joshua, and immediately after Joshua sent out the two spies, saying, "Go, view the land, even Jericho." The spies were sent out as a special precautionary measure. They were thoroughly to acquaint themselves with Jericho; its situation, its approaches, its surroundings, its fortifications, its weak places, the tone of the people—whether they were confident or, as we should say, demoralised by fear; all these things, and more as they might be able, these men were to spy out. Here was as much care as though all things depended on Joshua. Would not the Divine omniscience do the spying, and omnipotence secure the victory already guaranteed? As it proved, the work of the spies had nothing to do with the victory; it was in no way accessory to triumph. This was peculiarly God's battle, in which for wise purposes He seemed to be saying, "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." Yet God manifestly approves the sending of the spies, giving the whole mission the stamp of His approval in the salvation of Rahab, and in the commendation of her faith in the N. T. 1. *God's help was never intended to make us idle.* The promises are not so many arm-chairs in which we may quietly ensconce ourselves, and letting ecstasy take the place of service, cry out in lazy rapture,

> "My willing soul would stay
> In such a frame as this,
> And sit and sing herself away
> To everlasting bliss;"

neither are they couches on which we may recline, softly chanting about

> "that sweet repose,
> Which none but he that feels it knows;"

a truth which however happy as it concerns the world in general, would, in such an application of it, be simply wickedness in the lips of the singer. The promises of the Bible have sometimes been compared to golden stones with which *God has*

*paved* for His children a highway to heaven. Let us rather say, God has given them to us, that *we may pave* with them this firm and beautiful way; but that unless each one of them is laid and imbedded in active service and holy obedience, none will be firm; they will simply precipitate us into the Slough of Despond, or, if not, they ought to, lest like Ignorance we presently find that even from the gate of heaven there is a by-way to hell. The promises have been likened to a boat in which God's children ride to their desired haven; yet are there times when we must row hard to keep the head of the boat to sea, lest the waves prevail and swamp us, and we perish. If we would know the true value of God's assurances, it must be by using them for something better than idleness. 2. *God's help should not only mean no less work; it should mean more work.* It is because the end is guaranteed that we should work cheerfully and strive manfully. Is not this what fervent John intended, when he said, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"? How some of the old heathen, whose deeds have been sung in the Iliad and Æneid, used to offer their sacrifices, pour their libations, and then fight! How some believers in fate have striven on in life's battle, just because of faith in an idea, like the last Napoleon, who was always "accomplishing his destiny." Oh, how we ought to fight, who have for a faith and a guarantee the many and beautiful words of the Scriptures from the "God that that cannot lie," and "who made the worlds." How beautifully significant is Paul's phrase, "Fight the good fight of faith;" that is just why we should fight —the issue is guaranteed, and the very battle is a faith. (*a*) With faith in God, we should go into every conflict zealously. (*b*) It should be just the same in our temporary defeats; we should look on them as only temporary. What led David and Peter back into the way of truth, but faith? there was faith in forgiveness, in God's love, and the Saviour's tenderness; in help for future. (*c*) No true Christian should complain, because life will have to be like this to the very end. The inheritance to all of us is on the other side of the river; our strife is all on this side, and it will last all the time we are here. The long conflict is meant to develop manhood and womanhood in ourselves, as well as to inspire it in others. The life of an infant in heaven, saved ere it fell, will be beautiful; the life of the aged saint, made strong by many a conflict, seamed it may be by not a few scars, but graced withal by numerous victories, will be far nobler. The penitent thief's life above is doubtless glorious, but that of Paul must be incomparably more so. 3. *The assurances of victory given us by God demand not only our active efforts, but our caution and prudence.* Promise does not free us from work, neither does it absolve us from the consequences of indiscretion. The late Mr. Binney once said, "If the twelve apostles were walking on a railway when a train was rushing along, it would go over them, if they did not get out of the way, and the whole twelve apostles would be crushed to atoms. God would not interfere." Certainly God would not; such interference would be a miracle to save careless men from their folly; it would put a premium on imprudence, it would make law uncertain, not only for destruction, but for protection, and it would make carelessness the best form of prayer out. It is very instructive to hear God say, "I will not fail thee," then to see Joshua turn away and command the spies to "Go, view the land," and finally to see God stamp this mission with His manifest approval. To some people zeal is everything, and prudence is nowhere. They seem to think that Zeal is the very chief among the elect angels of the Almighty, sitting on His right hand, and close to His throne, whenever found sitting at all; and that Prudence, if in heaven, can only have a mission in keeping the most remote gate of the city, so that none but zealots may be suffered to enter. These good people make Zeal not only the chief, but almost the sum of the graces; Prudence is a stranger and a foreigner in the land—a mere Gibeonite, fit for nothing better than to be "a hewer of wood, and a drawer of water" on behalf of the disciples of Zeal. Such is not God's way, and such is not the spirit of the Saviour. "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently." is a word embodied with marvellous emphasis in the life of the

Messiah. Christ's true followers must have not only the zeal which consumes, but the prudence which is wise. No man has any commission for abolishing all but his own pet graces; we are to be Christians all round and all through, "transformed into the image of His Son." **II. The relation of patriotism to piety.** This woman had to choose between her country and her God, and she chose to put the claims of the King of kings before those of her sovereign. She was no traitor, who sold her country for considerations which were mean and paltry. True, she stipulated for the safety of her family, but even this could only spring from faith in God. This conclusion was right; but the case must be taken on its own merits: the N. T. does not speak one way or the other about *the character* of her works; it merely commends her faith because that was not inactive. God's claims must come before those of earthly monarchs. Would not this justify the claims of Rome, which are based on the Vatican Decrees? Ought not those of our soldiers and sailors who are Roman Catholics to desert to the enemy in a time of war, if the infallible (?) Pope bade them? The whole question lies in another—Is the voice of Rome the voice of God? A history of pontifical crime and sensuality, stretching through many generations, is answer enough to any who are not devotees. The simple truth as to Rome is this—it is a great mixed system, having a single name; the system is political and spiritual, but the name is wholly religious; its deepest political schemes are baptized with the name of God, and backed by the claims of God. It is on this ground that it claims the right to subvert the allegiance of the Roman Catholic subjects of any sovereign on earth. English dignitaries of that Church tell us that this will never be done. History answers, "It often has been done, and still oftener attempted; and this was so many generations before the decrees were defined and declared; the war stirred up between France and Spain in 1556, Black Bartholomew, the Spanish Armada, the Oath of Allegiance which followed the Gunpowder Plot, and not a few other instances bearing prominent official witness." The recent case of the Roman Catholic dignitaries is this—"Even if the Vatican Decrees mean what they have been said to, it is *impossible* that Rome should ever interfere to require English soldiers or sailors to desert the cause of their country;" that is to say, "*Rome having done this kind of thing for many generations, when she had no decrees to declare her voice to be the voice of God, cannot* POSSIBLY *do it now that the process is made comparatively easy since the passing of these decrees.*" I must grieve all lovers of freedom to say it, but surely when a church with a history like this claims liberty to teach high treason in every nation in the world—to teach it to the uneducated and superstitious, backed by all their hopes of heaven and fears of hell—the time has come to insist on so much of civil disability to Roman Catholics as shall ensure the safety of the state in which they may happen to live. This is not a question merely of tolerating a religion; it is a question of tolerating an open claim of right, made by the largest and most compact society in the world, to establish an *imperium in imperio* throughout the earth. That the claim is made in the *name of religion* is perfectly true; but when religion condescends to become an instrument of grave political disturbance, men must treat with the facts, and cannot afford to be duped by a label. **III. The relation of human sin to Divine triumphs.** About this woman's lie there can be no doubt whatever; it was as palpable a lie as human lips ever uttered. About the universal condemnation in the Scriptures of all lying there can be no doubt; no temptation, no danger, no good aims ever justify an untruth; to do evil that good may come is always sin in the judgment of the Bible. The N. T., however, absolutely commends the faith of Rahab, and the fact that her faith had works is the very point of the commendation given by the apostle James. The fact that she worked as well as believed was good; the manner of her working in this matter was indisputably wicked. The austere morality of James is alone sufficient to tell us that he could give no approval to that. The question has often come up, could the woman have protected the spies in any other way? Probably

not; it is enough that God could have protected them. The woman evidently did not *think* the lie very wrong, and God will probably judge her, as others, in light of the word, "To whom much is given," etc. A great part of the difficulty about this case lies in assuming that this woman should at once be an angel the moment she begins to be a saint. Her faith was mixed with much sin, but was good as far as it went. One difficulty remains; God seems to have suffered both a lie and a liar to be the means of sheltering His people, and that when they were engaged in a work intimately connected with the fulfilment of His covenant. God often takes sin in its own snares, and that is what He is doing here. The Canaanites, though children of Noah, and warned by many judgments, had chosen a lie for their very religion. As this woman, who had learned both her morality and religion of the Canaanites, turns to desert them, she fires this lie like a Parthian shot, which they themselves had taught her how to aim, and God suffers the lie to wound those whom the woman meant to wound, and to rescue those whom she sought to defend. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee;" and why should it not? Blessed be God, who condescends to overrule even sin for good. So God suffered Jacob's lie to work out good; so He permitted the malice and lying of scribes and Pharisees to work out the greatest of all mercies, the cross of Christ. And this principle is in the gospel of nature, and belongs to all men, Christians or not. The atheist should rid it from his book, ere he condemns it in ours. Drunkenness is seen working its own cure, sensuality its own shame, war its own healing, while even such outrages as that of the persecution of the Huguenots laid the foundation of much of the commercial prosperity of our land. Oh, there is hope for sinners, when God by sin overthrows sin. Just as He set Midianites against Midianites, and Philistines to beat down Philistines in some of the later battles of Israel, so He arrays sin against itself. With Christ for us, and sin working its own ruin, who may not dare to hope?

## *SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verses 1—7.—Secret Service.**

**I. The secret service of governments.** The sum yearly voted for this in our national estimates. The necessity for it born of human deception and sin. **II. The secret service of the world.** Secret pursuit of sinful pleasures. Secret enmity against, and watching of Christians. **III. The secret service of the Church.** The spying out of the world's most secret pleasures. None should go, but such as are wisely chosen and sent. It is always a service of danger. It is ever tending to the light. If necessary at all, the sooner it is over the better.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8—18.*

### Phases of Human Faith and Divine Mercy.

Notwithstanding the labours of such writers as Josephus, the Jewish Rabbins, and Adam Clarke, who from worthy motives have tried to shew that Rahab was merely an innkeeper, or hostess, there can be no doubt to most people that she was the abandoned woman which our version declares her to have been. Kitto summarises the argument nearly as follows:—The balance of opinion among scholars supports our translation; the Septuagint renders the Hebrew word by an expression which all agree means "a harlot;" the Epistle to the Hebrews and that of James follow the Septuagint; Rahab, who is so careful about the saving of her relatives, says no word as to her husband or children; after her settlement among the Israelites she married Salmon, a Jewish prince; and, finally, there are no such persons as "hostesses" in the East. Volney says,

"There are no inns anywhere, but the cities and commonly the villages have a large building called a khan or caravanserai, which serves as an asylum for all travellers. The keeper of this khan gives the traveller his key and a mat, and he provides himself the rest." It is important, as it affects the gracious teaching of the Scriptures, that Rahab's character be taken as it is set before us. **I. Some phases of this woman's faith.** 1. It seems, at the stage where the N. T. commends it, to have been *only the faith of fear*. It sprang from her terror (ver. 9—11). The strange and unprecedented passage of the Red Sea had appalled the Canaanites. The overthrow of Sihon and Og had alarmed them no less. The Amorites were a very powerful and warlike race. They had overcome the Rephaims or giants (Deut. ii. 20, 21); they had driven out the Ammonites and Moabites. A contest with Sihon, therefore, was a terrible thing for Israel; but they had Ebenezers of mercy even then behind them, Moses with them, and God and His word for all the conflicts before them. The Amorites were utterly defeated, and their king slain. The kingdom of Og was even more formidable. The territory was far larger, the people very warlike, their king a giant, and their land crowded with fortified cities. For the armour of those days the very houses must have been as forts; they were built, we are told, of huge basalt rocks, having the walls, in some cases, four feet thick, and thick stone slabs, swinging upon pivots in sockets, for doors. But the battle of Edrei was decisive; Og was slain, as Sihon had been, and his forces were utterly routed. No wonder that the fear of the Lord fell on the Canaanites on the western side of the river. No wonder that the inhabitants of Jericho felt their hearts melting for fear. With Rahab's fear there came something more; she was convinced that the God of Israel was "God in heaven above, and in earth beneath." Her fear led her to faith, and her faith to fear still more. Is such faith "saving faith"? Yes, if you follow it up, and no amount of faith will save any one without. See how God has often aimed at the salvation of men by beginning with their fears. What else but leading men to faith through fear was God's work through Elijah on Carmel, or through Jonah at Nineveh? What else had been God's work with these Israelites and their fathers in Egypt and the wilderness? The ten plagues, the miracle at the Red Sea, the judgment on Korah and his followers, the fiery serpents, and many other wonders were designed to work awe in the minds of the Israelites, and, with awe, belief. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" in these days of the gospel, as well as in those days of old. It does not matter how we begin to be Christians, if we only go on, and keep on. What men want is to be made to think; thought on God will soon lead to decision, let the thinking begin how it may. If a sleeper awake at night in a burning house, it is of no consequence whether he sees the fire, smells it, tastes the disagreeable smoke, feels the hot air, hears the roaring of the flames within, or earnest voices calling "fire" from without. The one thing for safety is to know that there is fire, and it does not matter at all by which of the senses it was first apprehended. Let no one say, "I am so full of fears; I cannot be saved:" it is just as well *for safety* that we apprehend God through fear as through any other faculty or power of our being. After all, there may be more faith in fear than many think there is. No man should expect to begin a Christian life in songs of rich experience. If a rich man were to adopt a ragged child from the streets, the joys of childhood would not come at once. At first there would be timidity and pain at all the new grandeur; it could be only when the child got to feel it was really loved that it would gradually come into the child-feeling, and begin to store up filial experiences. The twenty-third Psalm was not written as the beginning of David's piety. Peter wrote, "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious," but he had to find all that out by a long, a varied, and often a most humiliating experience. It was only as an old man, who had learned how Christ had prayed that Satan might not "sift him as wheat," how Christ

had often forgiven him, often encouraged him, and always loved him, that Peter could say, "He is precious." Go on with even the faith of fear; that also leads to an inheritance in the land. 2. Rahab's faith was *mixed with absolute sin.* I do not know if she was immoral at the time when the spies came; many good people say she was not, trying to prove the next best thing possible. Why should we go so far about to prove this sinner almost a saint, in order to make her fit to be saved? Perhaps it would be better to take her for just what Scripture calls her. It is much more simple, more encouraging to many, and certainly more sensible. If the Saviour could say to the Pharisees, "The thieves and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you," we shall do very little, excepting that we shall lower the grace of the gospel, by saying here of Rahab that she "had formerly been of ill fame, the reproach of which stuck to her name, though of late she had repented and reformed." Any way, Rahab lied. Not a few good men, with laudable motives, doubtless, but with most unwise zeal, have tried to justify or excuse even this. Under no circumstances whatever can a lie be anything but sin. The morality of the great epic poet of the Greeks, call him a heathen though we may, is blessedly better than some of the casuistry which Christian men have written on this. Homer said bluntly,—

> "My soul detests him as the gates of hell,
> Who knows the truth, and dares a falsehood tell."

With equal firmness and excellent definition good George Herbert also wrote,—

> "Lie not; but let thy heart be true to God;
> Thy tongue to it, thy actions to them both.
> Dare to be true! nothing can need a lie;
> The fault that needs it most grows two thereby."

Some who begin to serve God are discouraged when they find sin mixed with their faith. Sin cannot make us too much distrust ourselves, but no sin that has penitence should lead to distrust of God. 3. As far as Rahab's faith had knowledge, *it also had works.* James seizes on that feature. The woman hid the servants of God. She confessed her faith freely, and her confession is very wonderful. No amount of faith can be of any use without works. We may believe as much as the angel Gabriel, but not to work is to sin against all the additional light which goes with our faith. God garners faith in fruit, not faith in blossom. 4. Rahab believed in God *in the midst of unbelief.* She alone, in Jericho and all Canaan, seems at this time to have accepted Israel's God for her God. It is all very well and sufficiently easy to believe what every one else accepts; can we dare to believe God when alone? Can we believe when all the companions of our daily life scoff at us? Can we hold our faith singly about particular truths or principles? 5. Rahab's faith *went with compassion and love.* She had thought for the safety of her relatives. If we are doing nothing to save others, let us remember that no one can fill our place. No one else has our particular mind, or temperament, or experiences, or opportunities. 6. Rahab's faith was *only in God.* She believed in a living being of great power, who loved the Israelites, and helped them so that none could stand against them. She was absolutely without any systematic creed. Creeds are good so far as we must have them, but we had better leave them to come to us, and not go in search of them. Max Müller has pointed out that though "nature is incapable of progress or improvement," when men become familiar with any science they begin to classify its features. So the botanist began in time to classify flowers; and when men began to study language, that too entered upon its "classificatory stage." Classification is the necessary outcome of knowledge. Men accumulate items of knowledge, and then, in order to remember them better, and understand them more thoroughly, they formulate and arrange them. A Christian with much experience and many thoughts of God must have a creed; he cannot help it; it is the necessary outcome of growth. But it is unwise for anxious souls seeking Jesus Christ as their Saviour to burden and

perplex themselves with theology. Like Rahab, let them simply believe in Him who has helped so many of His people to such mighty victories. **II. Some forms of Divine mercy.** 1. God's mercy tends to strengthen faith from its very beginnings to its crisis. This woman had heard of the Red Sea, of the overthrow of Sihon and Og, and she believed. After her confession she is strengthened right up to the time of trial. (*a*) The Jordan divides; while the hearts of her neighbours became still more "as water," how Rahab must have been confirmed in the choice she had made! (*b*) Then here was this strange procession of this vast army, marching round Jericho, for six days, once a day Not a shout was to be heard; the only noise was from those seven rams' horns, which blew out their strange notice just in front of the ark, which was the symbol of religion and of God's presence. How unlike ordinary fighting it must have seemed! Taken in connection with the circumcision and passover hard by at Gilgal, how superhuman the aspect of the whole campaign must have become! Every movement would be saying to Rahab, "The God of heaven and earth is undertaking all." Surely the very strangeness of the siege, so terrifying to the Canaanites, would have tended to increase her faith. (*c*) On the seventh day, at the close of the seventh march round the city, each of the last six of which had been indicating the coming crisis, the people shouted, and the wall fell down flat, and the Israelites went up "every man straight before him into the city." It seems as though the wall fell down entirely round the city, so that the men who surrounded the city had not to walk some one way and some another to various breaches, but there was an open path before them all. We find, however, that Rahab's house was upon or against the wall, and yet that fell not; for the spies went in, and brought her and her family out in safety. Here, then, in the very crisis of trial, God gave this woman a sign which seemed to say within her, "Israel has covenanted with me, and, lo, the God of Israel makes the covenant of His people His own bond also!" All the wall, or much of it, had fallen; her house stood firmly. Thus from its beginning to its greatest ordeal does God's mercy graciously provide means to sustain and strengthen this woman's faith. Is Divine mercy less careful for us? No; to us all, if we will only look, God gives increasing light. "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. 2. God's mercy is *very pitiful in its estimate of human surroundings.* Only this woman's faith is spoken of in the N. T.; nothing whatever is said of her lie; and while she is called a harlot, there is no upbraiding of her because of past sin. The good is proclaimed with honour; the evil is recognised, but the very terms in which it is named seem to treat it as forgiven. Thus God "hides His face" from our transgressions, and our sin He "covers." 3. God's mercy is seen *giving exceptional faith conspicuous honour.* (*a*) This woman marries a prince in Israel; (*b*) becomes a progenitor of our Lord; (*c*) and has most honourable mention in the New Testament. Christ comes through all sorts of characters, and through all ranks of society; some ancestors are kings, and some are the poor. He seems to say by the very manner of His coming that He appears on earth for all sorts of sinners, and for all ranks and conditions of men. It is significant, too, that Christ's parents—the last in the line of genealogy—are poor, as though even the birth of the Saviour should lay its emphasis on the after word, "To the poor the gospel is preached." When sinful Rahab stands in the line of so much honour, faith in any one may well anticipate "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." 4. God's mercy is seen saving "all them that believe," *even though faith may be poor and small.* Rahab had only the faith of fear, and she and her family were delivered from death; doubtless the wonders of God's mercy, when Jericho fell, led her into a larger trust and a holier life. We cannot but look on her as in heaven, when we see her so commended in the New Testament. So does God encourage even fear, and so does He teach our feeble faith to hope in His mercy.

## SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

**Verses 8 — 12. The Differing Measures of Life's Influence on Men.**

"I *know* that the Lord" (v. 9); "We *have heard* how the Lord" (v. 10). "We heard, and our *heart did melt*" (v. 11). "Now therefore I *pray you*" (v. 12). All had heard the same things, and all feared; only one prayed, and only one believed and worked the works of faith. **I. There are multitudes who hear of the Lord, but the voice of the Lord is one voice to them all.** Some men hear or see more of the Lord's deeds than others, but, substantially, the deeds all "speak the same thing." There are no contradictions; the works and words are all in one direction. 1. *The teachings of* Nature *are substantially the same everywhere.* "The testimony of the rocks" is one testimony to all who read it aright. Each flower and blade of grass and tree alike tells of creative wisdom, power, and love. The voice is the same in all places. So it is of the "great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable." "The heavens declare the glory of God. . . . There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line [or teaching] is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world;" and the words are the same wherever men will listen to them and search out their meaning. African stars, American heavens, the Asian firmament, and the European sky, all speak in harmony. In the hymn usually attributed to Addison, but recently claimed, and apparently with good reason, as Andrew Marvell's, we sing—

> "The spangled heavens, a shining frame,
> Their great Original proclaim;"

and they proclaim Him without contradiction, and, unlike men, without controversy. Law everywhere preaches the same thing about fire and water, about heat and actinism and colour, about chemical properties and mechanical appliances, about obedience to its precepts on the one hand, or our transgression of them on the other. 2. *The teachings of Providence have been everywhere similar.* In all times the wicked have often been found to "flourish like a green bay tree," and the true-hearted have often been "an afflicted and poor people;" yet the industrious and the wise have ever had their reward. Sudden accidents and calamities have been the heritage of all the ages. Similar weaknesses, sicknesses, diseases, bereavements, graves, have been, from the first proclaiming one providence for all times and lands. 3. *The teachings of Human History are similar.* Man's sins—his wars, murders, lyings, duplicity, mere pleasure-seeking, his pride and selfishness—have always tended to degradation and misery: Man's virtues—his sympathy, self-denial, generosity, love, meekness—have always worked peace, and brought a goodly heritage. 4. *The teachings of the Human Conscience and the Heart have never materially differed.* Conscience has brought fear to the wicked and peace to the pure, from the day when Adam hid himself till now. The heart that has lived merely for this world has always had its sense of emptiness. Human desires and yearnings and hopes have ever gone out to things beyond death. 5. *The teachings of the Bible have ever been in one direction.* The early times had not so much light as these latter days, in which God has spoken unto us by His Son, but the light has ever shewn one path, having but one kind of traveller, and one hope and end for them all. **II. When the mightier works of the Lord and His sterner words have been forced prominently on the thoughts of men, they have always tended to work fear and despondency.** Now some divided sea, now the smiting of mighty kings who could have helped them, and now promises of a heritage to some one else which threatened them with dispossession, have, all through human history, made the hearts of men "to melt." Disastrous earthquakes, the ravages of epidemic disease, appalling accidents, the threatenings of the Scripture against idolatry and all sin, have, when forced

suddenly on the attention, made men's hearts "as water." Power, when not understood, ever works awe. **III.** While the works and word of the Lord bring fear to all men at first, in some fear gives place to faith, and desire, and love. The inhabitants of Jericho all heard and trembled; only Rahab passed out of fear into faith and service. Nothing is more marked in the Bible than this differing measure of influence wrought by the same word. Whether the risen Saviour has revealed Himself to men, or Paul has preached at Athens or in his own lodging at Rome, it has ever had to be written, "And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not." How are *we* hearing? "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Verse 9 only. **I. The testimony of those who are weak and untaught.** "I know," said Rahab; what witness should *we* bear? "Much is given" to us;—education, associations, godly parents, Christian teachers, an entire gospel of mighty and merciful works. **II. The confidence of the weak and untaught.** "I *know*," etc. In all Rahab's gospel there was not a single promise. She only saw two or three of the mighty acts of the Lord, yet she believed, doubting nothing. Our gospel has the cradle, the promises, the tenderness, and even the tears and the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. **III. The encouragement given by the weak and untaught.** "The Lord hath given you the land," etc. Rahab was with these Israelites "in much assurance;" she might have no promise of her own, she would read and understand and proclaim the blessedness of theirs.

Verses 10, 11. COMING TO A KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH.

**I. The use of religious memories.** The miracle of the Red Sea had taken place forty years before. This was a period equal to half a lifetime. If living then, Rahab could have been only a child. Perhaps, to her, the miracle was only a tradition; but she thought on it, and it helped to lead her to a conclusion. 1. *We want help from all the faculties of our being when we are seeking to know the Lord.* Within, we have much to dim our vision: pride, self-love, and sin in many forms. Without, temptation has a thousand fair disguises, and every time we sin we hide God from our eyes. We might as well try in the same instant to look north and south, to the sky over our heads and the earth at our feet, as to seek sin and see God. To know Him, we need each power of our being for that one purpose. 2. *Memory, however, is peculiarly helpful in getting this knowledge.* (*a*) Memory brings to us life's *select* teachings. We look through our family albums, and do not find there *cartes* in general; they are not portraits of Her Majesty's army or navy; they are select—every face is the face of a friend. We look through our Bibles, and we have in them favourite passages which fill us with peace; and we know far better where to find our twenty-third Psalm, or our fourteenth of John, than some name in the genealogies, or some obscure incident written in the book of Chronicles. So when we look through our minds, many things are hidden by time, only select memories come up, and these, where they are religious, are the most beautiful and the most helpful. (*b*) Memory often brings delineations of God from the past which are both clearer and purer than our present impressions. They are pictures of our childhood, at once full of realism and full of innocence. (*c*) Memory might bring up, not only its visions of the past, but its reproof in the present. Rahab, and we not less, might find room to ask, "How am I, compared with my thoughts of God years ago? what has my life been since—alas! what? Have I grown in the knowledge of Him?" Memory helped her to decide in this her last opportunity; destruction soon came, suddenly as at the Sea, and these few moments with the spies were standing for her eternity. What of our moments; are they equally important? what of our memories; are we using them, while yet there is time, to help us to know Him, "whom to know is eternal life"? **II. The blessings of observation and reflection.** "The two kings of the Amorites" had fallen but

recently. The victories obtained over them made this woman *think*. Some pass through life seeing but little, and not reflecting on even that. Life is a stream which runs past them; they see its waters shimmer in the sunlight, and hear the cheerful ripple, the soft murmuring, or the ceaseless roar of its progress, but they never stoop to drink. Life carries everything past them, and brings them nothing which they make their own. Who can wonder if danger and death overtake them while yet unprepared? **III. The value of cumulative evidence and repeated emotions.** The Red Sea made Rahab do nothing, the death of Sihon does not apparently move her to any works, the overthrow of Og leaves her still in Jericho; but the coming of the spies, and their conversation, added to all that went before, make her covenant for her salvation. 1. The unused evidence of life. No man can destroy this evidence. It is accumulating either to (*a*) gradually convince us, or to (*b*) finally overwhelm us. 2. The unimproved feelings of life. Joys, sorrows, fears, etc., are either exhausting and withering our hearts, and leaving them callous, or they are being treasured up and cultivated within us as the beginnings of our eternal hymn of adoration and praise. **IV. The salvation that comes of facing the whole truth, and then confessing it to others.** 1. We should never conceal from ourselves our utter helplessness as against God. 2. We should never deny even to our own hearts the glory of God; (*a*) His sovereignty in heaven above; (*b*) His sovereignty in earth beneath. 3. What we acknowledge of the glory of God to ourselves, it is best to confess to His people. (*a*) It is God's right. (*b*) His people may be able to help us. (*c*) Our confession may lead to our salvation.

Verses 12, 13. **I. Faith looking within.** 1. It has self-distrust. 2. It has no rest till it secures covenanted mercy. 3. Though it be faith, it yet needs some help from signs—"Give me a true token." Those who feel most sincerely how blessed it is to believe when they have not seen, cling, nevertheless, to that sign of the everlasting covenant, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. **II. Faith looking around.** Faith in God, though in a sinner like this, and in days so far back and light so feeble as hers, has ever the same tendencies. 1. It wants others to be in the covenant also. 2. It begins among its own kindred. 3. It places *the life* first, and makes *things* subordinate. 4. It not only has compassion for others, but expectation from others: "I pray you, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness." Faith is very human in its pity and generous kindness; it is not so superhuman that it can receive harshness for gentleness without feeling wounded. Some people know very well that the faith of Christians should lead to compassion and help; they utterly forget that it is natural for even faith to be pained by ingratitude. **III. Faith looking on high.** 1. It has adoration and praise for God's power (v. 11). 2. It regards that power no longer as a terror, but a joy. Rahab wanted to get with God's people, in order that Divine power, instead of destroying her and hers, might defend them. The truth which at first made the heart melt, became speedily its "shield and buckler." 3. Faith has not only praise for God, and a new feeling as to His power, it has regard to the honour of His name: "Swear unto me by the Lord."

On the passage in James ii. 25, Manton gives the following very suggestive thoughts concerning the case of Rahab:—

"I. God may choose the worst of sinners. Even in a harlot faith is acceptable. II. The meanest faith must justify itself by works and gracious effects. III. Believers, though they justify their profession, are still monuments of free grace. It is *Rahab the harlot*, though *justified by works*. IV. Ordinary acts are gracious, when they flow from faith and are done in obedience. Entertainment, in such a case, is not civility, but religion. A cup of cold water in the name of a prophet is not courtesy, but duty, and shall not lose its reward. A carnal man performs his religious duties for civil ends, and a godly man his civil duties for religious ends. There is no alchemy like that of grace, where brass is turned into gold, and actions of commerce are made worship. V. The great trial of faith is in actions of self-denial. Rahab preferred

the will of God to the welfare of her country; Abraham the same will to the life of Isaac. A man is not discovered when God's way and his own lie together. VI. The actions and duties of God's children are usually blemished with some notable defect. Rahab's entertainment was associated with Rahab's lie; Moses smote the rock twice, and with faith mixed anger. Thus we still plough with an ox and an ass in the best duties. VII. God hideth His eyes from the evil that is in our good actions. He that drew Alexander while he had a scar upon his face, drew him with his finger upon the scar: God putteth the finger of mercy upon our scars. Job curseth the day of his birth; it is simply written, 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job.' How unlike are wicked men to the Lord; with them one blemish is enough to stain much glory, but with Him a little faith and a few works are thrown into everlasting honour."

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 14—21.

### Social Integrity and the Public Faith.

Perhaps no one knows the value of integrity better than those who abuse it. Just as the great are valued after their death, and just as we prize our mercies when they have departed from us, so they who have forfeited their truthfulness have a keen appreciation of its worth. It is not a little suggestive that this woman who has just told a lie to shield the spies, proceeds immediately to ask *an oath* from them, wherein she and her family may find some assurance of salvation. Probably the cruelties attendant on the worship of Baal, and the lewd rites connected with the service of Ashtoreth, had so far debased the public conscience of the Canaanites generally, that Rahab had become familiar with both deceit and its consequences in many forms. She proves herself an adept in deceiving others, and then asks a solemn covenant to protect herself from similar deception. This is ever the way where truth is lightly esteemed; they who think that there is little harm in telling lies, ever confess the measure of their wickedness by the suspicions and precautions in which they endeavour to shield themselves from the deceit of others. The distrust of a liar is a sort of habitual confession, "If every one were as wicked as I am, life would have no securities, and would become unbearable." Thus, ever, "out of its own mouth" the judgment of sin is spoken. **I. The importance of public integrity.** It is a *national calamity* when a nation is not believed. When the policy of a government is made up of diplomacy and subtlety and acts of small cleverness, the policy is ruinous; it may be dignified by the name of 'statesmanship," but the name can only make the ruin greater by deferring it, through a temporary concealment. A good label will not alter the contents of a poison-bottle, nor can a promising name keep a rotten vessel afloat through a storm. One Machiavel is not only enough to pass a name into a proverb, and to introduce a new set of words into language; he is also enough to curse a country for generations, till some succeeding Garibaldis, through self-denying and disinterested integrity, shall, notwithstanding mistakes, do a little to restore the public faith. It was a terrible verdict for Crete, when "their own poet," Epimenides, wrote, "Liars and sluggish gluttons, savage beasts, the Cretans are," and when an apostle gave the sentiment the fearful prominence of a Scripture record, in which the nations still read, "The Cretans are alway liars." *The commercial world* could not go on for a month, if "credit" were not maintained. There are few pulpits where the relation of truth to prosperity is preached as it is "on 'Change." He who does anything to lessen the faith of men in each other, does just so much to ruin them for all prosperity in the things of this life and the next. Probably one or two of our own countrymen in high places, during the last quarter of a century, have done sufficient to lower the tone of the public conscience manifestly and appreciably for a long while to come. When falsehoods are repeatedly told, which depend on a sufficient amount of grave impudence and effrontery in the teller to provoke the laughter of the hearers, it is perfectly well understood that the laughter makes the audience in some measure participators in the untruth, and that rebuke is silenced in its very

beginnings. Thus it has got to be known in some quarters, that a great liar need only have an equivalent impudence and gravity, to be heard and received as though he were only a wit, and no liar at all. This flippancy of untruth, practised by anybody, is an incalculable wrong to everybody, and as such it should be resented. **II. The culture of the public conscience.** 1. *These spies were most careful not to make a promise which they could not keep.* They held Rahab bound by several conditions. (*a*) They would not be responsible, unless she bound the sign of the crimson cord in the window. As God Himself had once bidden the Israelites to mark their houses, so that the destroying angel might pass them by, in like manner this woman is to distinguish her house from the abodes of those who were delivered over to destruction. (*b*) The spies covenanted that they would be guiltless of the blood of any of this family who might be slain out of the house. Any one might say, "I am of Rahab's family;" nothing would avail, but to be in the covenanted dwelling-place. (*c*) The spies would be blameless, unless Rahab kept the oath a secret. Let her once betray that, and all Jericho might bind its windows with crimson cord. 2. *These two spies were representative men, and it was therefore most important that the promise should be made carefully.* (*a*) Joshua was held bound by the word of these men. They were his servants. (*b*) All Israel was bound by their word. The men represented the nation. (*c*) Even God graciously condescended to recognise the promise of the spies as His own bond. While almost all of the wall of the city seems to have fallen, the part on which Rahab's house stood was safely preserved (chap. vi. 22, 23). Had this one promise to a Canaanite been broken, the good faith of Israel would have been despised among the idolaters, wherever it had become known; added to this, the Israelites themselves would have been harmed. These men who were sent to spy out the land cultivate a conscience void of offence, Joshua and Israel support them, and the Divine seal is set to this care of a truthful spirit. The Divine teaching of the O. T. in these early times is most emphatic in the stress which it lays on truthfulness. No one can carefully read of the solemn tokens which God gives with His own covenants, and the solemn charges which are given in connection with vows, oaths, and all forms of promise made by men, without being made to feel that all lying and deceit are hateful to God. Promises were, in every case, to be made with the utmost care, and when once given, to be most sacredly kept.

## *SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 14.—THE SELF-PRODUCING POWER OF PIETY.

In the record given of the creation we read of the tree "whose seed was in itself." All life tends to spontaneous increase. It is ever thus with the life of God in a human heart. Of each grace it may be said, "Its seed is within itself." **I. Mercy begets mercy.** "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy." Rahab had risked her life for the spies, and now they readily respond, "Our life for yours," or literally, "Let our soul be to die instead of you." **II. Faith stimulates faith.** Rahab had said, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land." Under her influence the spies have insensibly and more than ever come to regard this as a truth; thus they answer, "*When* the Lord hath given us the land." **III. Kindness and truth reproduce themselves in kind.** "We will deal," etc. Rahab, though false to some, had been kind and true to them, and nothing of her good words falls to the ground.

Verse 18. It seems necessary to bear in mind, when reading this verse, that fanciful interpretations of Scripture may be no part of the teaching of God. Any quantity of imaginative nonsense has been written on the incidents of this chapter, and particularly of this red cord. Thus Lyra, who is followed by Mayer, and partly by some others, found here, that "by Rahab is meant the church of the Gentiles; by the two spies, the sending forth of the apostles two and two; by Jericho, the mutable

moon; by the king of Jericho, the devil; by the scarlet red cord there is figured out the blood of Christ," *etc.*, and *ad lib.* Can it be seriously thought that God ever meant to teach this, or anything like it? Ought we not to ask with some anxiety if we can teach as Divine truth things of this character, without grave harm to many who hear us? The maxim of Cecil is a good rule for us all—"The meaning of Scripture is the word of God." Nothing else ever was, ever is, or ever will be.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 22—24.

WITH AND "WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD."

**I. He who watches and works without God, watches and works in vain.** The king of Jericho had sent to take the spies, but they escaped out of his hand; "the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not." "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain;" so, apparently, out of the rich experience of his life the aged David counselled his son and successor in "The Song of degrees for Solomon." The children of God, when they are without the presence of their heavenly Father, labour as much in vain as the greatest idolater or infidel. The king of Jericho and his pursuers fail; equally do the Israelites themselves, when a week or two later they go up without God against Ai. Moses well said, "If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." **II. He who goes out under the care of God is safe from the wrath of man.** If Rebekah and Jacob had not lied, the younger son would still have inherited the blessing. The promise of God needed no falsehood of men to make it into a truth. If Rahab had said only the thing which was right, God could with equal ease have secured the safety of these His two servants. Even had it been otherwise, they had been no less safe; they fall well, who fall into their Father's arms. Where God does not bless our *righteous* efforts to preserve ourselves, we need not seek safety in sin. Those were noble blushes which rose on the face of Ezra, when he said, "I was ashamed to require of the king a band of men and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way" (cf. Ezra viii. 21—23). Paul in his perils; Luther at Worms; Wesley preaching under threats of violence and falling stones. **III. He who reports the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord can never report too confidently or too cheerfully.** The ten spies had given the report of fear; these give the report of faith. The giants and the Anakim were probably as huge as they were forty years before, the cities walled up as near to heaven, and the Israelites no larger than they were formerly; but where fear then saw grasshoppers in the presence of giants, faith said now, "Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land." The message of these two men to Joshua was full of confidence, full of cheerfulness, and full of praise. They thanked God for victories yet to come. 1. He who makes the best of everything which concerns God, serves God and men much better than he who is timid and doubting and depressed. It is quite possible to make too much of the work of men; we cannot well over-report God. Too many modern servants are far more like the ten spies than the two. 2. A bad report of Divine things is not only injurious to others, but most harmful to ourselves. Good Bp. Hall well said, "Our success or discomfiture begins ever at the heart. A man's inward disposition doth more than presage the event. If Satan sees us once faint, he gives himself the day. There is no way to safety, but that our hearts be the last that shall yield." We have need to keep our heart with all diligence; for out of it, even in this sense, there are issues of life. The glad confidence in Christ which some constantly manifest carries its own reward; for "the joy of the Lord is their strength," and hardly less strength to all who are sufficiently with them to catch the enthusiasm of their praise.

## CHAPTER III.

### *THE PASSAGE OF THE JORDAN.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. In the morning**] The morning after the addresses and reply recorded in chap. i. 10—18. **From Shittim to Jordan**] Josephus (Antiq. v. 1. 1) gives the distance as sixty stadia, or furlongs, being nearly eight English miles. **Lodged there**] *i.e.*, rested there till the return of the spies, and till the completion of the time named in chap. i. 11. There is nothing in the verse which requires the misleading conjecture that they lodged here only one night. **2. After three days**] According to chap. iv. 19, the people crossed the Jordan on the tenth of Abib, which it may be well to remember is not called "Nisan" in the Scriptures till more than nine hundred years later (cf. Esther iii. 7). "Three days" before crossing the river, *i.e.*, on the seventh of Abib, the time of the passage was foretold (chap. i. 11). Early on the morning of the eighth, the preparations began for the movement of the camp from Shittim (chap. iii. 1), the raising of the tents, the march of the vast host for eight miles, and their temporary re-encampment before Jordan, probably occupying them till the close of the eighth (*Hebrew*) day of the month. On the evening which introduced the ninth of Abib they would begin to lodge before Jordan, resting there over the following day, and throughout the night which commenced the tenth of the month. *The spending of two nights and one clear day before Jordan seems in no way contradictory to chap.* iii. 1.

The spies probably left Shittim in the morning, or as early as mid-day on the sixth of Abib, walked eight miles to the Jordan, and about seven more from Jordan to Jericho, reaching the latter place considerably before sunset (chap. ii. 5). Reckoning inclusively, they would be in the mountains "three days," *i.e.*, on nearly all the seventh, the whole of the eighth, and from sundown till say four o'clock on the morning of the ninth, when two hours' walk in the darkness would bring them to the Jordan, swimming the overflowing waters of which they would rejoin the camp now pitched on the eastern side of the river. Thus understood, the spies left Shittim one day before the army; this agrees with the margin, "had sent," of chap. ii. 1, coincides with each of the four verses given in the three chapters, and is in harmony with the view of Josephus. **3. The Priests the Levites bearing it**] The duty of bearing the ark on ordinary occasions belonged to the sons of Kohath, who were Levites, but not priests (cf. Numb. iv. 15); on solemn occasions it was customary for priests to undertake this duty. **4. Come not nea unto it**] The distance of about one thousand yards was probably to be observed, not only in the short march to the river, but also when crossing; the people were to pass the Jordan at this distance below the ark. **5. Sanctify yourselves**] There seems no sufficient reason for the very general supposition that the formal rites of sanctification were dispensed with for want of time. The phrase "for to-morrow" shews that there would be as much time for washing the garments, etc., as in the instance given in chap. vii. 13. **10. Drive out**] "One of several incidential confirmations of the view that many of the Canaanites were expelled, and not slain" (*Groser*). **15. Jordan overfloweth**] Owing to the melting of the snow on the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains. "The swellings of Jordan" seems to have driven the wild beasts from their usual lairs (cf. Jer. xlix. 19). **16. The City Adam**] The site is unknown; probably it was several miles to the north; the back-flow of the accumulated waters was apparent as far up the river as this city. **17. All the people**] All excepting the women and children of the two and a half tribes, with the 70,000 armed men left to guard them (chap. iv. 12, 13).

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### *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1—6.

#### THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

Joshua had received the evening before, through their officers, the reply of the people to the charge which he had given (chap. i. 16—18). Their unanimous and ardent fealty must have filled this fine-spirited man with thankfulness to God, and given him good hope in the people: "And Joshua rose early in the morning." 1. *God gives us encouragements, not merely for our joy, but for action.* The Lord loves the praise of His people; He loves it best when the songs of their lips are set to harmony with the tread of feet that run in the way of His commandments, and with the noise of labour made by hands which hasten to do His will. Mere praise is like a tune in one part; it is only a theme, pleasant for the moment as a solo, but poor and thin and insufficient, unless followed by these harmonies of labour. 2. *God gives His servants the confidence of men, that they may use it*

*promptly for the good of men.* Nothing sooner loses its beauty and fades than the unused confidence reposed in us by our fellows. Changing the figure, service is at once the exercise and the bread of trust; and when a leader does not use the confidence given him by those about him, he is simply allowing it to stiffen and die. He who hears over-night, "All that thou commandest us we will do," had better rise "early in the morning," and begin to turn this spirit of obedience to good account. This, again, cannot be better done than by leading the people manifestly nearer, not simply to their leader's, but also to their own inheritance. 3. *God gives some men wisdom to see into the possibilities of the future, but he who can read events to come should be careful not to disappoint his auditors.* (Chap. i. 11, with iii. 2.)

Thus the first two verses of this paragraph lead up to the important subject of the Divine presence, on which much stress is laid in the four verses that follow. **I. The sign for the special movement of God's people is God's presence going before them.** 1. It is noteworthy that in both the Old and New Testaments this is repeatedly made the sign for going forward. This was the case during the marches of the wilderness; the pillar of fire and cloud preceded the host. David at Baal-perazim was to know that the Lord went out before him when he heard "the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees;" not till then was he to go forward to the battle. What else was the waiting for Pentecost by the men who were to tarry in the city of Jerusalem for this preceding presence of God? It was of no avail for even apostles to go, till God went before them. They were men of good ordinary ability, they had recollections of the Saviour's example to guide them, and glorious memories of His love to inspire them; yet they were to tarry, as though they were helpless as children, waiting for the promise of the Father. The Saviour's words, "Without me ye can do nothing," are written not simply in the Gospel of John, but throughout the Bible. 2. The Pillar of Fire and Cloud, and the Ark of the Covenant, were the two and only visible guides, indicating God's presence, that the Israelites had to accompany them in their journeys. There is one feature which is common to them both: in times of rest they were with the people, in times of marching the Cloud always and the Ark sometimes went before them. Resting, the Cloud stood over the camp; marching, it went before the people. The Ark, too, was set up in the middle of the camp, and in ordinary marches was carried in the midst of the Israelites; but in a great emergency like this the Ark leads the way. Surely all this is significant, and intended not merely for the Jews; read in the light of the tarrying for Pentecost, does it not seem "written for our admonition"? God's presence with us should always lead to praise, worship, and work; there are, however, solemn seasons in the history of the Church when God seems manifestly to go before His people, and then both Testaments teach that His people must follow. There must be no resting then, nor are ordinary methods of worship and work sufficient for periods like these. Does not this comprehend all great revival movements in the history of the Church, not excepting that which has recently excited so much attention throughout England, and is now stirring the multitudes of London to new thought and intense feeling? Is God with this work? Are men being saved, and helped to turn to holiness? If so, energy of this kind does not come from beneath, neither is this the manner of man. There cannot be the least doubt that ordinary methods of teaching and training are good for ordinary times; but ought we not to be prepared for God to sometimes go altogether before us? And if it be God who goes before, we must follow,—follow gladly, heartily, and earnestly. The Ark of His presence may get quite out of the usual track, it may wander even into the bed of the river; timid Israelites may fear lest it should be swept away in the flood; yet, *if it be His presence*, they will do well to follow, for even this unusual way leads to a rich inheritance for the teeming thousands of the people, who till it is trodden only experience the bitterness of a grievous bondage, and the possession of a barren desert. Holy fear and holy caution may be well, and none

should be angry or harsh with any who are moved thereto, for things are not so visible to sense now as on the banks of the Jordan; yet those who fear harm from the flood of unusual feeling may do well to remember that the Ark commands the waters, and not the waters the Ark. **II. Even when God is most manifestly present with His people, He ever leaves ample scope for faith.** 1. The Pillar of Cloud was, at this time, probably withdrawn. The people had only the every-day Ark. That which for forty years had been a supernatural assurance that the Lord was with them, had probably vanished altogether. This could not but have been a trial to those who were weak in faith. 2. Although the passage was to take place on the morrow, it does not seem that the people at this time had any idea of the manner in which it was to be made. 3. When they arrived at the river, much firmness would be needed by them all. Think of the faith required by those who were the first to cross, and of the demand made by the accumulated body of water on the trust of those who crossed last. However much faith may be taxed when we see few signs of God's presence, let none think that poor faith will suffice when God is manifestly with us. Faith is taxed then more than ever. True, it has blessed encouragements, but the encouragements are not given for nothing. Those whom the Lord most helps, have temptations to unbelief which His ordinary servants know little of, and from which the boldest might well shrink. He is but poorly taught, who thinks that any of God's children on earth ever walk by sight. **III. The consciousness of God's presence best goes with deep reverence and profound humility.** The people were not to come near the Ark by a space of more than half a mile. With so much reason to love God for His mighty works on their behalf, it is just at the point where His goodness should provoke love, that His wisdom finds an occasion to teach them reverence. Glowing with thankfulness for Divine help, the very distance at which they are kept teaches them to walk "in awe, and sin not." The advance of the Ark for nearly three quarters of a mile in front was calculated no less to teach them humility. There was the Ark, borne only by a few weak priests quite away from its armed guard, and right in the direction of the enemy. It should have been enough to make Israel say once for all, "We can do nothing to protect that. Our many thousands of armed men are not needed to guard the Ark, however much, as these rising waters teach us, they may need the Ark to defend them." Thus we have an inter-working of several things: Mighty works are wrought, which tend to provoke love, love must not forget reverence, triumph must go with humility; and then we are taught incidentally by the distant Ark that the position of reverence and humility is after all the very best position in which to see God. Had the Ark been close to the people, few would have seen it; the distance that is favourable for right feelings is also best for clear perception. 1. *The tendencies of love to familiarity.* Flippant thoughts; flippant quotations of Divine words; flippant prayers. 2. *The tendencies of reverence to a cold and stately formality.* God loves this no better than irreverence. David is called the man after God's own heart; seemingly this was most of all on account of his enthusiasm. **IV. Reverence is nothing, and humility is nothing, unless there be also holiness.** "Sanctify yourselves." 1. Holiness is to be the rule of God's people *in every-day life.* Luther said, "Holiness consisteth not in a cowl or a garment of gray. When God purifies the heart by faith, the market is sacred as well as the sanctuary; neither remaineth there any work or place which is profane."

> "We need not bid, for cloister'd cell,
> Our neighbour and our work farewell:
> The trivial round, the common task,
> Would furnish all we ought to ask;
> Room to deny ourselves; a road
> To bring us, daily, nearer God."—*Keble.*

2. **Yet there are** solemn seasons in our lives, which demand our *special consecration to God.* The very work that we do, the journey that we take, the new period

of life on which we enter, the special tokens which we have of God's presence; these, in themselves, may urge on us this old commandment, "Sanctify yourselves." 3. Remember that "*Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*" It is said that an atheist, well known to the late Bp. Wilberforce, once contemptuously and flippantly accosted him by saying, "Good morning, sir: Can you kindly tell me the way to heaven?" With dignity and wisdom quite equal to the occasion, the Bishop is said to have immediately answered, "Turn *to the* RIGHT, and then go straight on." Salvation is through Jesus Christ only; it is never by works, it is also never without works.

## *SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verses 1, 2. THE PENALTIES OF GREATNESS.**

**1. Great encouragements are to be followed by diligent service.** The people gladly owned Joshua as their leader, and Joshua at once began to enter on his arduous service. He "rose early," and set to work diligently. (See introduction to previous discourse.) It is said that when an ancient Roman was once accused of witchcraft, in drawing away the fertility of his neighbours' lands into his own, because he had great crops and theirs were but small, he had brought with him to the place of trial his well-fed oxen, his industrious servants, and the instruments of his husbandry: pointing to them in the presence of his judge, he exclaimed, "These are the instruments of my witchcraft, which I diligently apply, and besides these I use none." The idle find that nothing prospers; the diligent, that there is little which fails. God's blessing comes to men *through* their efforts, not *instead* of them. **II. The avowal of the public confidence should be succeeded by prompt efforts for the public good.** 1. No one will trust for long those who are slothful. 2. Self-seeking is even worse than idleness. Joshua, in his energy, sought not so much an inheritance for himself, as for all the people.

> "Self-love thus pushed to social, to divine,
> Gives thee to make thy neighbour's blessing thine.
> Is this too little for the boundless heart?
> Extend it, let thy enemies have part.
> Grasp the whole world of Reason, Life, and Sense,
> In one close system of Benevolence:
> Happier as kinder, in whate'er degree,
> And height of Bliss but height of Charity."
>
> *Pope.*

**III. The utterances of a God-taught mind are to be sustained by the most scrupulous fidelity.** It was in no mere enthusiasm that Joshua had promised that the Jordan should be crossed in three days; even if it were so, he here shews himself faithful to his word. Lavater wrote: "Words are the wings of actions;" with too many they are wings to nothing but the tongue. How much higher than the common estimate of the dignity of speech was that of the late Canon Kingsley, when he gave utterance to the following thoughts: "What is it which makes men different from all other living things we know of? Is it not speech—the power of words? The beasts may make each other understand many things, but they have no speech. These glorious things—words—are man's right alone, part of the image of the Son of God—the Word of God, in which man was created. If men would but think what a noble thing it is to be able to speak in words, to think in words, to write in words! Without words we should know no more of each other's hearts and thoughts than the dog knows of his fellow dog; without words to think in, for if you will consider, you always think to yourself in *words*, though you do not speak them aloud; and without them all our thoughts would be mere blind longings, feelings which we could not understand ourselves. Without words to write in we could not know what our forefathers did—we could not let our children after us know what we do."

If such be the dignity of speech, how sacred our words ought to be. Think of the careless words, the deceitful words, the vain words, the malicious words, the slanderous words, in which

men sin with their tongues. No wonder, when we think of the high dignity and distinctive privilege of speech, that Jesus Christ should say, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment." When the Saviour speaks thus of men generally, what manner of persons ought His disciples to be in all holy conversation and godliness? And when God gives to men special light, and a prominent position, how carefully they should speak, and with what holy fidelity should they seek to let none of their words fall to the ground.

If preferred, the subject of these two verses might be thrown into some such form as the following: I. The responsibilities imposed by great encouragements. II. The responsibilities imposed by the confidence of our fellows. III. The responsibilities imposed by words based on superior know edge.

Verses 3, 4. FOLLOWING AFTER GOD. **I. He who follows God in His covenant must follow Him at all times and everywhere.** Of what use would it have been for Israel to have marched after the pillar of cloud in the wilderness, where there were no rivers and no enemies, if they had refused to follow the ark through Jordan? 1. *Men select the paths of life*, even when conscience points clearly to one, and no better reason than personal preference can be found for the other. Even Christian men are found doing this. Unlawful callings, questionable companions; forbidden pleasures. Bye-Path Meadow looks fairer to walk in than the King's highway, and men choose the pleasant, irrespective of where it leads. 2. *Men select the principles which guide and direct life.* Political society is made up of parties; it would be very interesting, but perhaps not a little humiliating, could we know how far father, mother, friends, and family traditions have had to do with the formation of these distinctive associations of men, and how far each member of political society has been guided and ruled by principles. Religious society is made up of many denominations; how far are these the outcome of taste, preference, and love of ease? It is not a little strange to think how many Christian men inherit not only their bodies from their parents, but also their consciences and their creeds. It is fashionable in high life to think much of descent, and to trace it through as many generations as possible: think of the divine historian writing down for our perusal presently the ancestry of our individual conscience, and the genealogy of our personal faith. What a book it will be! What a holy satire on ecclesiastical polemics, and on the enthusiasm of our Christian (!) controversies! 3. *Men select the duties of life.* Some are ignored as inconvenient, while others are performed because they are not so particularly troublesome; and when the process is over, the performer lies down to sleep, softly murmuring to himself as a preliminary dream, "I am a Christian; I am a Christian too." 4. *Men carry this idea of selection even to the precepts of the Bible.* As Dr. Bushnell has forcibly pointed out, we have "respectable sin" and sin unrespectable, where the Scriptures make no such distinction. Fancy any church gravely proposing to exclude a member for being covetous or a railer. Yet these are deliberately included by the apostle with the fornicators and idolaters, with whom, if called brethren, he told the Corinthians not even to eat. People are quite willing to think that some of the sins named in 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, are fatal to a Christian profession; judging by the love of money and the love of scandal current in many churches, they seem equally willing to forget that in these same verses it is said of extortioners, of the covetous, and of revilers, they "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." With ever so much indignation against Darwin and Spencer, Tyndal and Huxley, the Church also has not only its theory but its practice of "Natural Selection," and the "survival of the fittest." The inconvenient commandments of God are pushed out of life, and left to weakness and death, while such as are thought bearable, and at the same time helpful to respectability, are selected as the essentials of piety, and made, according to the doctrine that prevails, the sign of a living

faith or a direct passport to eternal life. O for more grace that shall lead Christians everywhere to say from the heart, "Lord, I will follow Thee withersoever Thou goest." **II. He who follows God fully must be prepared for much walking by faith.** He who "commits his way unto the Lord" will often be led to wonder at the strangeness of the path. There is no saying where the next steps will take him; they may lead into darkness quite beyond the power of human ken, and into depths where the only voice that reaches the ear will be simply one that says, "Take no thought for to-morrow." This is not by any means the only instance where those who follow the Lord have had to walk through the place of mighty waters, and where the only thing seen interposing between themselves and destruction has been the covenant which told of help from an omnipotent Arm, and of love and sympathy and care from a Father's heart. **III. He who follows God need have no fear; for when men really follow, God Himself goes before.** God asks us to go nowhere and do nothing in which He is not willing to be with us. If God be with us, that is salvation; the very rocks will have water for our thirst, the skies manna for our hunger, the torrent a path for our feet, and even the walled cities will fail to lend to our adversaries any sufficient defence. **IV. He who follows God will constantly find himself walking in new paths.** "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." There will be new service, new experiences, new prayers, and new songs, till he shall enter into the heavenly inheritance, and take his part with celestial hosts in singing the song of the Lamb. The way down to death is ever the way to obscurity and contractedness, till it ends in the darkness and narrowness of the grave; the way after God is incessant development and increasing light, till it leads into the broad expanse of heaven, and into the effulgent brightness of the Divine presence and glory.

Verse 4, last clause. SERMON FOR A NEW YEAR.

When the Israelites heard the evil report of the ten spies, and rebelled against Moses, God said of all of them under twenty, "Your children shall *wander* in the wilderness forty years." During that long period the people must have become very familiar with the desert; its principal geographical features would be known by heart to men who frequently crossed old tracks and re-trod old paths. Crossing the Jordan, the way would be strange and altogether new; it would be new, moreover, not merely in a geographical sense, but altogether, to most of them, a totally fresh kind of experience. That they might know this way, which they had not passed heretofore, they were to follow the ark, and follow it in such a manner that each could see it for himself. *Time has strange paths and new experiences as well as territory*, and the teaching of God to keep the Ark of the Covenant in sight is important, not only in the one case, but equally so in the other. We who "know not what a day may bring forth" may well wonder into what strange and new paths we may be led by a whole year. Happy is he who can walk every step with his faith directed to a present God, and his eye looking into that covenant which is "A lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path." **I. The year upon which we have entered may bring new perplexities; therefore we should seek afresh the Divine guidance.** Financially, socially, spiritually, the days may form a very labyrinth and maze about us. How are we to walk where our own discernment is insufficient, and when the wisdom of men would be only as the blind leading the blind? It is said that when Philip of Macedon was about to set out on his Persian expedition, he sent to consult the oracle of Delphi as to the issue of the war. The answer was given with the usual ambiguity, "The bull is crowned, everything is ready, and the sacrificer is at hand," a reply which would do equally well to foreshadow the king's victory or depict his death. Within a few days Philip was slain with the sword of the assassin Pausanias. These old oracular utterances form a grim satire on the advice of men, not a little of which is given more with a

view of avoiding responsibility, than of affording genuine direction. Jonah was by no means the last of the race who think more of the prestige of the prophet than of the fate of the city. What with human selfishness and human blindness, we often need better guidance than that of our fellows. He is led well and wisely who makes the Scriptures the man of his counsel,—who prays, "Shew me Thy ways, O Lord, teach me Thy paths;" for "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will shew them His covenant." **II. The year may bring new afflictions; therefore we should each cultivate a closer union with God.** He who forms a lowly habit of depending on Divine help, gradually gets his life rooted and grounded into the life of God. "Growing up into Him" who is our strength in days which are calm, we are not likely to fail in the day of tempest and storm. How the ivy clings to the strong oak, just because when the last rough wind which had loosened it ceased to blow, it began afresh to knit fibre to fibre, and ivy-root to oak bark, so as to be prepared for the trial that should come next. Nature uses her calms in preparing for her storms. So should we use the peace and prosperity of the present to anticipate the possible strife and adversity of the future. **III. The year may bring new temptations, and therefore calls on us to "watch and pray."** As we get older we are apt to grow into a careless feeling of security. Men virtually say, "I have stood, I do stand; therefore I shall stand." Christian history should rather teach us to put it, "I have stood, I do stand; therefore I may grow careless and fall." It was just after the destruction of Sodom which threw Abraham's fidelity into prominence, by disclosing the fall of Lot and the guilt of the cities of the plain, that the father of the faithful denied his wife. It was the long-tried Moses who sinned at Meribah. It was after David had so long behaved himself wisely before Saul; after he had danced before the ark, written many a sweet song for Israel, and volunteered to build the temple, that he turned adulterer and murderer. It was long after his noble confession, at the end of all the miracles, and when he had for years delighted in the teaching and love of the Saviour, that Peter said, "I know not the man." **IV. The year will discover new duties, and thus requires our re-consecration to the service of Christ.** There will be new demands for work, new opportunities, and new responsibilities. The ardour and zeal of the past will suffice but poorly for the labour of the future. It was on "the first day of the first month" that this Ark of the Covenant was set up; it was God's new year's gift to encourage His people to a year of fresh work and worship. When David was called from the sheepfold to be a king, Samuel anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord; the new sphere and the new duties were anticipated in this customary act of formal consecration. So we need stage by stage throughout our lives "an unction from the Holy One." **V. The year may bring new privileges, which we should be prepared to embrace.** The new way will have new scenery, new possessions, new joys, and should have new songs. As a traveller in classic Rome, or among the mountains of Switzerland, provides himself with a guide, that he may see as many things and points of interest as possible, so we should be careful to search out the mercies which are "new every morning," and often place ourselves where broad views of Divine greatness and love shall gladden our spirits and renew our life. **VI. The year may reveal a new life and a fresh inheritance; therefore we should be prepared for death.** Our cold river may also have to be crossed. Shall we find on the other side the New Jerusalem, and one of the many mansions ready for us? Shall we find again, waiting for us there, our loved ones, who have already departed to be with Christ; and with them, and the whole host of the redeemed, take our part in the New Song?

Verses 5, 6. **I. The Lord's wonderful works demanding His people's special sanctification.** This is by no means a solitary instance in which God requires His great works to be received

by man with peculiar holiness. (Cf. Ex. xix. 10; Numb. xi. 18; Joel ii. 15—32.) If the more wonderful workings of God are not met on our part by increased holiness, they will assuredly do us harm. The Pentecost that blessed three thousand, probably left a multitude in Jerusalem harder in their hearts than ever. **II. The Lord's wonderful works demanding His people's devoutest reverence.** The *priests* carried the ark only on very solemn occasions. They, and not the Kohathites, were the bearers here. It was the same in the march around Jericho, and in other important events where God was, or was supposed to be, specially present. The same feeling was taught to Moses; with God before him in the burning bush, he was to put his shoes from off his feet; with God passing by, he was to hide himself in the cleft of the rock; and when God met His servant on Sinai, we are told that it was amidst such manifestations of power and majesty, that Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Faber's beautiful hymn, beginning

"My God, how wonderful Thou art!"

is written throughout with exquisite feeling, beautifully expounding the awe that should go with love, and the rapture that may mingle with our lowliest adoration.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—18.*

### Divine and Christian Honours.

Honour is one of the rewards of life which Christian men have sometimes failed to honour. In the ordinary conscience and judgment it has often been confused with petty pride and paltry ambition. The world has tried to dignify mere position or possessions by the name of "honourable," till even good men are not quite certain that coming to honour does not mean, at least partially, coming to something wicked. Society tells us that "the king is the fountain of honour," and that is supposed to hold good even when the fountain has no better repute than Richard III., Henry VIII., or one of the Charleses Stuart. A member of Parliament is always "The Honourable Member," whether he has any honour or not, and if he happen to be in the Privy Council, then he is "Right Honourable," though in mind and character he may be neither the one nor the other. Irrespective of what a lady may be, she has only to be attached to the household of the Queen to be a "Maid of Honour," and even transactions so nefarious as the traffic through Penn for the liberty of the Taunton school girls has been supposed to leave the "honour" quite unimpaired. A man need only be the younger son of an earl, the son of a viscount or a baron, or possess some equally adventitious claim, and forthwith society dubs him "honourable." Thus it has come to pass that we have had honourable outlaws and honourable debtors, whose only thought has been how to avoid payment of that which they owed; all sorts of honourable people, with hardly enough character to keep blushes out of the face of a respectable tramp or of a decent beggar. So perhaps it is not wonderful that Christian men have been found to think small things of honour, and to treat even the fame of a noble life with scant courtesy, as if it were only some more respectable rendering of worldliness and sin. Our great poet had other thoughts when he said—

"If it be a sin to covet honour,
I am the most offending soul alive."

He tells us more distinctly what he means, when he writes—

"Mine Honour is my Life; both grow in one;
Take Honour from me, and my Life is done."

Men have done themselves wrong—we cannot say how much wrong—by allowing themselves to be driven from the desire for a just fame before the eyes of their

fellows. God, who also knows human weaknesses, has not dealt with them in a manner so indiscriminate. He says to Joshua, "I will magnify thee, I will magnify thee before the people; this day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel." **I. The honour which God loves to put upon His servants.** God would magnify Joshua as He had magnified Moses. He would give him a large place in the minds of the people; He would do this by a miracle. God tells His servant this before it comes to pass; He fills him with thought about it, and sets his mind and desire on this matter. Honour and desire for honour cannot all be sinful, when the Holy God does this. We are not altogether to shut ourselves out from the wish and hope that others may think well of us. There is a certain place in the public mind which we may earnestly desire to fill; we may yearn to shew men that *God is with us*, with us in our character and work, with us for the sake of others. 1. *God's delight in honouring His faithful servants is shewn throughout the Bible and all through human history.* Take the case of Elijah; the long drought, the miracle on Carmel, the prayer and the answering rain, the fulfilment of the predictions concerning the death of Ahab. The preservation of Daniel in the den of lions was God's distinguishing honour set upon the life of the man who was found faithful both in his business and his religion. Think of Paul foretelling the disaster in the Adriatic Sea, and of his being able to speak to those about him of the angel of God who had stood by him to reveal the future, an impression presently deepened by the marvellous incident at Malta, in which the bite of the viper from the fire brings no harm. God loved to exalt the man who had so exalted the Saviour. All through profane history it has been the same: there are great names which tower up above all other names, just because God has honoured the men who bore them. How human all this makes God seem; how human in His sympathies! This is how we feel about our children. Who would not see his son honoured? It seems to bring God so near, that He should think about His children as we so naturally and ardently think concerning ours. Do not, then, let us worship a great abstraction of omnipotence and majesty; this is *a Father* who waits to magnify His children, just as we might wish to worthily exalt ours. When we draw near to adore God, let us also learn to love. 2. *How is it that more of His children are not magnified by God?* He could honour us all, if He would; why are so few made prominent? Well, if God were to magnify everybody in this way, the world would all become pious in order to get its celestial decoration—a kind of blue ribbon from above—and thus religion would become the most selfish and vain and sinful condition of human life. But we need not contemplate the evil which would arise in this direction. There is another reason which intercepts that by a long way. So very few of us could bear to be magnified. Most men would shew their honours, and find in them an occasion for pride. Honour, such as Joshua's, would ruin most of us; so God withholds this source of harm. By-and-by, when we can bear it, He is going to make us all kings—kings and priests unto Himself; but we cannot endure that till we become like Him, and see Him as He is. How human this is also; it is thus that we feel in our holiest longings for our children. If it were not for the temptation, and the mischief, and the curse, few would think any honour too great for his own son. Were we to consult only our hearts, where should we come to the limit at which we would stay the honour and the joy of our children? And if it were only a question of God's heart how we, as His children, should be magnified even on earth, nothing would be too large for God's love, only the honours would harm us, curse us, destroy us; so just as we should desire to place limits on our children, our heavenly Father limits us. 3. *The life which God is prepared to honour is the life which is willing to give itself for God and for men.* Joshua puts all his honour back again on God; he gives his life, and the influence which comes from his magnified name, not to win a possession for himself, but to bring his brethren into their inheritance. When all the fighting and labour are over, Joshua asks for himself only a poor and insignificant

estate, which we only hear of as his own name makes it conspicuous (cf. chap. xix. 49, 50). Joshua sought to bless men, and desired to magnify the name of Jehovah. God is just as willing to magnify any one of us, if we were only able to bear it, for there are no prejudices with Him. But what about all our self-seeking, self-love, self-adoration? what of this constant turning of our thoughts to ourselves, as if the chief good of the universe began and ended there? When we are ready to give ourselves for others, God will be ready to set us on high before men. "If any man serve ME, him will My Father honour." **II. The honour in which a true servant loves to proclaim his God.** 1. *The true servant refers all gracious words to their Author.* "Hear the words of the Lord." There is no spirit of plagiarism; all the grace is referred back at once to God. It reads like an early edition of Paul—"God forbid that I should glory, save," etc. This anticipates the song of "Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto Thy name be the glory." Joshua says never a word about his own magnified name; he simply says, "Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God." 2. *The true servant thinks the words of his Lord worthy to be heard.* Joshua is anxious to bless men and encourage them, and he knows that these Divine words will be helpful. Oh for a larger measure of enthusiasm in the Scriptures, and a faith which will believe that they are the power of God unto salvation! 3. *The true servant, even in his incidental expressions, shews that he thinks there is none like unto God.* "Hereby . . . the living God," etc. The people had left a country of dead and polluted gods, and the gods of the Canaanites were no better than those of the Egyptians. The very manner in which this is said shews how incidentally the thought of the contrast came to the speaker's lips. If we love God indeed, our love will make itself seen in a multitude of forms. 4. *The true servant shews that he thinks nothing too hard for the Lord* (ver. 10). Our life also has to meet with opposition from men, and with natural obstacles, but through Jesus Christ we should feel and know that we may be "more than conquerors." 5. *The true servant confirms his proclamation of God by pointing his fellows to the visible link in which God is seen connecting Himself with the interests of men.* "Behold the ark," etc. The superstition around us is a great evil; we have need to be even more filled with concern at the way in which men seek to obliterate from the earth all visible tokens and traces of Deity. The materialist does this on principle, as a theory; the pleasure-seeker and the careless do it in practice; the true servant of Jehovah points to the tokens of Divine presence, and says, "God is there, and there, and there." With which class do we take our position? Are we with the superstitious who obscure the Lord's presence? with the men whose lives proclaim that they are "without God in the world"? or can we take our stand with this man, who, looking at to-morrow's difficulties, says, with a holy faith, "Behold the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you"?

## *SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 7. THE SPIRIT AND TENDENCIES OF WORLDLY AND DIVINE HONOURS.

**I. Worldly honours often have no relation to character, while the honour which comes from God is usually more within a man than upon him.** The dignity in one case is often accidental and foreign; in the other case it is through and because of nobility of spirit. **II. Worldly honours lead to pride, while the honour which is of God has humility.** "As the lark that soars the highest, builds her nest the lowest; the nightingale that sings the sweetest, sings in the shade when all things rest; the branches that are most laden with ripe fruit, bend lowest; and the ship with the heaviest cargo sinks deepest in the water,—so the holiest Christians are the humblest" (Mason). It has frequently been pointed out that soon after his conversion Paul said he was "*unworthy to be called an*

*apostle.*" Nearly thirty years later this experienced Christian of much grace and many works wrote to the Ephesians, speaking of himself as "*less than the least of all saints.*" Just before his martyrdom when his course was finished and his good fight fought, he wrote to Timothy, "*sinners, of whom I am chief.*" Thus, too, Joshua goes away to the Israelites, forgetting to say anything about his own magnified name. How often when worldly honours come to a worldly spirit, they soon get to be the only thing about the possessor for which even the world has any respect. The spirit which is really noble wears with increasing humility both the applause of men and the favours of God.

**III. Worldly honours are unsatisfying, and tend to promote selfishness, while the honour which is from God is filled with peace and benevolence.** Any man who gives himself up in a worldly spirit to delight in fame, even though it should be fame for fame's sake coming through spiritual work, gets to live in a world which is daily narrowing down to himself; and when life comes to be bounded all round by his own small individuality, no wonder that life is soon found to be mean and insignificant. The man who wears his honours with a godly mind gets to live every day in a larger and more beautiful world, while the mere creature of fame is like a prisoner in the cell, the iron sides of which drew gradually closer each week, till the miserable victim was presently crushed to death.

**IV. Worldly honours are temporary and perishing, while the honour which comes from God abides for ever.** Time has done nothing to obscure the names of Abraham, and Moses, and Joshua, and Samuel, and Paul; they are as great before men to-day as when they were first magnified by the Lord. Even poor Byron, looking at the world's glories, could only write,—

> "Thy fanes, thy temples, to the surface bow,
> Commingling slowly with heroic earth,
> Broke by the share of every rustic plough:
> So perish monuments of mortal birth,
> So perish all in turn, *save well-recorded Worth.*"

Thus while all material honours, and everything which might be great, but which is made worldly by being received in a worldly spirit, perishes and vanishes away, the glory of the Lord, like His mercy, endureth for ever and ever.

It is thought by some that at the place where the Israelites crossed the river our Lord was afterwards baptized by John. The best MSS. call the place named in John i. 28, Bethany, not Bethabara. Origen, it is thought by Dr. Clarke and others, altered the reading to Bethabara, which means "the house of passage." The name Bethabara seems to have given rise to the conjecture that the Saviour was baptized at the spot where the Israelites went over; some maintain that the baptism was administered at the very place where the priests supported the Ark in the midst of the river. If this were so, it is deeply interesting, nor could it be justly treated as any mere coincidence. It would be most significant to think that in the spot where Israel was baptized unto faith in Joshua (as their fathers, in the Red Sea, were said to have been baptized unto Moses), Christ, the Joshua of the New Covenant, was consecrated to the service in which He also sought the faith of a mighty multitude, that He might win for them an abiding inheritance. It would be temptingly suggestive for homiletical purposes if we could believe that God's people entered into that Canaan which is a type of heaven at the very place where Jesus was afterwards set apart as a Saviour for His people. What a picture it would be of the Lord's own word, "I am the way." The evidence, however, for the fact is insufficient, and perhaps the very interest attaching to the idea should make us receive it cautiously. No amount of spiritual significance in teaching could possibly compensate for an untruth, or for carelessness respecting truth. Rahab might save the spies in her own way, and Rebekah might seek to make the covenant to Jacob sure by similar methods; God's truth is never so much adorned by us as when we make it manifest that it has taught us truthfulness.

Verse 8. "I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR THOU ART WITH ME;" OR, THE SWOLLEN RIVER, THE VISIBLE ARK, AND THE UNDISMAYED PILGRIMS.

This passage has no direct teaching about death, and it would seem a wrong use of Scripture to suggest that it has. Let it be granted freely that Canaan may be a type of heaven, and Jordan a symbol of death, still we have no authority to make the parables "stand on all-fours." If this were otherwise, the heaped up waters, their back-flow to Adam, their on-flow to the Dead Sea, the double valley of the river; the very drops of the water, and the different trees of the land might, no doubt, all be found to be "instructive." While, however, God does not here give us direct teaching about death, there is no reason why this beautiful *illustration* of a believer's confidence during the passage of those last deep waters should be passed fruitlessly by. **I. We are reminded that death, like the Jordan, is sometimes calm and peaceful, and sometimes turbulent.** Ordinarily the river was narrow, and easily fordable; but it was in the time of "the swellings of Jordan" that the Israelites had to cross over. 1. *Death is always a trial.* No man ever becomes familiar enough with death to do away with its ordeal and solemnity. We may have seen it often in others, but it will be new to us. Concerning some loved ones who have passed its cold waters before us, we may have only thoughts of gladness. We may think of them and sing in the soft and rich strains of *T. K. Hervey*—

"I know thou hast gone to the home of thy rest,
Then why should my soul be so sad?
I know thou hast gone where the weary are blest,
And the mourner looks up and is glad;

"Where Love has put off, in the land of its birth,
The stains it had gathered in this;
And Hope, the sweet singer that gladdened the earth,
Lies asleep on the bosom of Bliss.

"I know thou hast gone where thy forehead is starred
With the beauty that dwelt in thy soul;
Where the light of thy loveliness cannot be marred,
Nor the heart be flung back from its goal.

"I know thou hast drunk of the Lethe that flows
Through a land where they do not forget,
That sheds over memory only repose,
And takes from it only regret."

So brightly and peacefully may we be able to think of some who have fathomed the depths before us. With all this to cheer us, death will still be new when we come to it for ourselves, and not without its solemnity. But those who can contemplate death like this, find that not even its strangeness and awe can destroy the calm given by its attendant hopes. 2. *Sometimes death is made harder by physical suffering.* Many, doubtless, suffer more severely in life than when passing from life, but with others these conditions may be reversed. Terrible accidents or fearful diseases may make death as the swellings of Jordan. 3. *Great social trials sometimes make death a severer ordeal.* For a father to die, and leave a family in poverty, or for a widow to pass into eternity, and leave several children unprovided for and orphans, must aggravate very terribly the pains of dying. 4. *But the pain before which all others seem to sink to peace, must be that of dying "without hope."* May God deliver us from such turbulence as the river must shew to souls who come to it like this. **II. We are reminded here that even when the attendant circumstances of death are very aggravated, the believer may pass through fearing no evil.** The priests in their faith could "stand still in Jordan," and the believing hosts of the people could tread the bed of the river in confidence. Faith gives death also a very different appearance from that which it presents to men in unbelief. 1. *The natural view of death has fear and even terror.* (*a*) Look at the world's literature. A modern writer tells us that the foremost men of Greece and Rome applied more than thirty epithets to death, "all indicative of the deepest dejection and dread." To them death was an "iron sleep," "an eternal night," "gloomy,"

"merciless," and "inexorable." Our great English poet, whom for many years the world has delighted to honour, wrote—

"Death is a fearful thing:
To die and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
. . . . .
'Tis too horrible!
The weariest and most loaded worldly life,
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death."

This is a dull, hard strain, and these are but a few of many dreary lines which the brilliant mind that catered so long and ably for the world's joy poured forth on this dread subject. Another wrote: "Neither the sun nor death can be looked at steadily." Byron said—

"How clay shrinks back from more quiescent clay!"

And Dryden—

"O that I less could fear to lose this being,
Which, like a snowball in my coward hand,
The more 'tis grasped, the faster melts away."

(*b*) What, too, are the world's unwritten thoughts on death? Think of the myriad thoughts like these which no one ever sets down. Think of the stolen glances, and the quick turning away; of the deeper darkness which so often, to some, seems to lie hidden away within the folds of each returning night. If the speech be so sad, what are the feelings themselves? 2. *The view of death given to faith is not like this.* Look at Christian literature, and commune with the thoughts of the children of the cross. One says, "I am now ready to be offered," etc.; "Having a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better;" "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Nor is this spirit of triumph an exceptional heritage of apostles. The whole history of the Church is harmonious with the songs of its dying sons and daughters. **III. We are reminded that the only sufficient encouragement for faith to contemplate, when we come to death, will be the presence of God through the covenant.** The Ark was at once the sign of safety and the occasion of confidence. If we are to lose the fear of death both now and when we come near to it, it must be through Him who came to deliver us from this "bondage." The cross of Christ does not bridge the river, but it stands up well out of its cold waters, that we may keep it in sight; and seeing it we are to behold not merely a cross, but the covenant of His presence who is "able to save to the uttermost." It is knowing this that we shall "stand firm in Jordan," saying, "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

Verse 9. THE INCOMPARABLE WORDS OF THE LORD.

**I. Consider the words of the Lord in their claims.** They are "the words of the Lord *your God*." They come as such to every one in the multitude of the human race. No family privileges or adversities, no dignity, and no poverty, no dislike to them or disbelief of them can in any measure weaken their claims. To every living man, whether atheist, deist, idolater, worldling, or Christian, they come as the words of his Lord and his God. 1. *God made us each, and our opinion about that cannot alter His claims upon us.* Our view of the origin of the human race can never alter the fact itself. 2. *God supports us and provides for us, and our disbelief can never affect the measure of our obligation.* Fancy an intelligent Israelite saying, "I know that I had manna every morning, and sometimes quails; I know that I drank of water, which flowed out of a rock, just as I was perishing; I know when the hills were all about me, the Egyptians behind me, and the waters cold and threatening before me, that the sea opened and became as a defending wall on either side, and that while I escaped mine enemies perished from my sight; I know that I have lived for forty years in a desert which did not seem to have supplies enough to support me alone, and that two or three millions of my people have always had enough, and often more than enough; I know that the words of Moses, who professed to be God's prophet, always came true—that the manna had a way of spoiling or failing when we gathered it contrary to

instructions—that the brazen serpent healed me and my bitten children, just as he said it would, and that the man himself often had a moral majesty about him, which brought us back to obedience when we felt most rebellious; I remember feeling almost awed that morning when he came down from the *eruption* of Mount Sinai—for such, as an intelligent man, I prefer to call it—with his face shining in that strange brightness, and when he dashed down the tables of stone in front of our new calf, and made Aaron and all of us feel as if we had done something very wrong: I cannot forget all these things, but I am wiser than I once was, and now I see clearly that all the events which we used to call miracles were the working of natural causes, that Moses was a shrewd and far-seeing man, and as to his moral majesty, why he was born to command. True, the coincidences between our need and the development of these natural causes, which so often helped us just as we were perishing, leaves something to be explained; but I can understand so much, that I am sure this part may be passed over. Now when you talk to me of *the claims* of the word of the Lord, don't you think I am fairly entitled to ask, How do you know that there is any Lord, much less that you have His words?" Oh, how devils might laugh, and how God, if He were less than God, might despair, when men reason like this! **II. Think of the words of the Lord in their purity.** The tendencies of them are to make men holier and larger in heart. They stimulate no mean passions, such as vanity and selfishness. The ambition which heaven stirs within us is exaltation through a more exalted spirit. The Lord had told Joshua that the day of his honour was at hand; but Joshua was stirred by the words of the Lord, not to petty ideas of his personal greatness, but to efforts which should secure the inheritance of the land to the people. The tendencies of the Bible are to lead us to (1) forgetfulness of ourselves, (2) to a generous interest in men, and (3) to ardent praise of God. **III. Reflect on the words of the Lord in their distinctiveness.** 1. *The words of the Lord are the only words which are ever addressed to man's most serious difficulties.* Only Divine words are heard as to the way of crossing into Canaan, and driving out the Canaanites. In man's greatest necessities it is still the same; only the words of God ever propose to meet them. (*a*) Law has no suitable words. Think of listening to law in our bereavements, in our need of the pardon of sin, of sanctification, of hope beyond the grave. Law is pitiless, cold, and inexorable. Law never said, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye comfortably unto men, and cry unto them that their warfare is accomplished, that their iniquity is pardoned." Law never proposed for Israel a path through the sea, manna from heaven, water from rocks, or that the Jordan should stand up in a heap till the people had passed over. (*b*) Men have never had any suitable words for the deeper necessities of their race. The physician accompanies the sick within sight of the grave, but once seeing that open before them, he has nothing more to propose. He has no medicine for death, and not a single cordial is there in the whole of his pharmacopœia which he has ever thought it worth while to prescribe as a cure for bereavement. The engineer has opened no door for us on the other side of the grave, the chemist has failed to bring immortality to light, and the mechanician has never contrived anything to bear the burden of sin. The naturalist, the poet, and the philosopher, as the priests of this world must, have ever passed by, and left the world's wounded on the other side; or if pity has drawn them to the side of distress, they have discovered no words but those of the old stoic, "You must bear up as bravely as you can." It is only God who ever speaks to the subject of our keenest miseries and profoundest want. *On questions like these, there are no words but the words of the Lord.* 2. *The words of the Lord, even on our deepest necessities, are not vain words.* (*a*) They are practical. We can always use them. They are not mere theory, or poetry, or mysticism; they are never Utopian. Men can read

them before any floods or any enemies, and know what to do next. (*b*) They are thorough and sufficient. They do not buoy men up for a season, and let them sink after all. It is something to say for Christianity, at least, that even its bitterest enemies have never been able to charge its words with being weak and comfortless. (*c*) They betray no effort. There is as much ease about words that propose to divide a river, to raise the dead, or to save men, as about words which simply give directions concerning our least important duties. The Saviour's words in calming the sea, feeding the thousands, or raising Lazarus, are as free from hesitation or effort as any of the words in the sermon on the mount. 3. *Thus it might be clear to all men that the words of the Lord are the only words of hope.* No other words are addressed to our extreme wants; not even enemies can charge them with weakness. Those who lean on them most are most satisfied with them, and they never seem so dear as at the point of death, farther than which we cannot trace their effect. These were the solitary words of hope to Israel at the Jordan; in all our greater need they alone can afford hope and help to us. Let us receive these words, then, with enthusiasm, as did Joshua and the people of Israel. Wherever in our life we come to the words which belong to any present difficulty, let there be no doubt and no distrust till we are found safely on its other side. Let us tell these words to one another, as though there were little else worth telling, crying here and there in life's way to our perplexed and helpless brethren, "Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God."

Verse 10. "By what do we also recognise the presence of a living God among us? 1. By His word which He still causes to be perpetually published among us. 2. By His deeds which He is still perpetually performing."

"How should we think of God? 1. Not as a rigid order of nature. 2. As the living God and ruler over all the earth—the mightiest Ruler, the best Ruler." *(Lange.)*

Verses 11 and 18. "I. **We need new grace for new experiences.** Some trial which we have never before endured is to be borne by us. Some duty which we have never before discharged is to be performed by us. Some relationship that is entirely new is to be formed by us, and we know not how we shall bear ourselves. Let us take courage. He who gave these minute directions to His ancient people will not fail us; and though He may not come to us with such specific guidance, He will yet by His providence and Spirit give us the help we need. **II. When we have to cross any river of difficulty, let us put the Ark of the Covenant into the middle of the stream.** In simple phrase, when we come to a difficulty, let us see Christ in it, and then we shall be able to surmount it. He turns the water into dry land. He makes our difficulties stepping-stones to glory. We are never really in danger when we can see Him. **III. There are no degrees of difficulty with God.** All things are equally easy to omnipotence. Let us not limit the Holy One of Israel by supposing that any of our emergencies are too great for Him to help us through them." *(Dr. William Taylor, New York.)*

"The Ark was not a talisman that wrought wonders, as if by some magical charm; for in after years, when Israel's warriors took it into the battle-field, they were defeated (cf. 1 Sam. iv. 5—10). That which is a help to faith when God commands it, becomes a snare when He has not given His sanction to it. There is all the difference in the world between faith and presumption." *(Dr. Wm. Taylor.)*

Verse 13. "This seems to have been the first intimation given to the people as to the manner in which they were to cross the river." *(Bush.)*

"Joshua telling the people of the miracle that God would now do upon Jordan, laboureth to confirm their faith about the expelling of the heathen before them. When marvellous things are done for us by the Lord, we are hereby taught to build our confidence on His promises touching things to come" (*Dr. Mayer*, A.D. 1647.)

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 14—17.

### MAN'S FIRM FAITH AND JEHOVAH'S MIGHTY WORKS.

Three events, each of imposing magnitude, are recorded in Scripture history as having taken place within a few miles of each other in that reach of the river Jordan which is opposite to Jericho. First, here is the passage of the Israelites through the miraculously divided river, when, without counting the families of the eastern tribes, some two and a quarter millions of people went over into Canaan. Five hundred and fifty years later, near to this same place, Jordan was divided again. As if to throw into prominence the significant symbolism in which the crossing of this river illustrates death, and to re-affirm in a marked manner that dying has no actual death to the children of God, Elijah, just before his ascent to the heavenly inheritance, smites the waters with his mantle, when they again part, that this ransomed servant of the Lord may also pass over. Elijah is seen to cross Jordan immediately before going up into heaven, as though designedly to connect the river with death, and to throw over the latter, as is so vividly seen with the former, the beautiful assurance of the sufficiency of Divine love and power to bring the believing traveller safely into rest. Elisha returns from accompanying Elijah, and the waters part again; thus twice in one day is Jordan divided, not far from Jericho, over against which all Israel had crossed more than five centuries before. Somewhere in this neighbourhood the more important event of the Saviour's baptism also took place. The Lord's people had gone repeatedly into a river which through His power opened to make a way for their feet; the Lord Himself enters, and Him the waters overwhelm in a most significant baptism, the full meaning of which cannot be reached till the Saviour endures that other baptism, of which He cries, "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" The waters of death overwhelm Deity, that redeemed humanity may pass through them, unharmed, into the richer life that lies beyond. Near the place where the typical people pass safely into the land, notwithstanding the roughest "swellings of the river," there Christ is consecrated to a work which offers the only ford to death, and at which point all of us must pass into life, if such life is really to be ours. Thus here, too, does this greater JOSHUA "begin to be magnified" in a glory which shall endure for ever. Here, then, are three imposing events, each of which seems mysteriously connected with the other in the idea of death, which is common to them all; and each of which lies centuries apart from the others, as though, by the very breadth of the time which they cover, they were to lay stress on the unchanging and stately purpose of God to bring safely through the grave into life that great multitude which no man can number. While we might well shrink back even in pain from the irreverence of a merely fanciful exposition, it would be almost like "taking away from the things of this book" to resist the impressions which fairly come from so suggestive a sequence and method in the Divine working. Bearing these thoughts in mind, there are three principal features in the narrative which claim attention:—**I. Entrance into the Promised Land is through the wonderful working of God.** 1. *Think of the glory of God which is shewn in the salvation of His people.* (*a*) It knows no dimness whatever. No physical difficulty throws the slightest shade upon the majesty of His power; no lack of patience, or forbearance, or forgiveness so much as suggests any imperfection in His grace and love. The many sins of the wilderness are all cast behind His back; now that His people are to be brought into their inheritance, He remembers their transgressions no more than as if they had never been. Even the recent guilt on the plains of Moab seems as far removed from His children as the east is from the west. But though the glory of Divine mercy is so beautiful in this passage of the Jordan, it is the perfection of God's power which is forced most prominently on our attention. Think of the shock which throbs through the whole river the moment it is touched by the feet of the priests; of that half of the flood which hastes away, as if

affrighted, from the presence of Jehovah; of the ever accumulating waters in which the other half of the "deep utters its voice, and lifts up its hands on high," as in very awe, nor dares to pass the presence of its God. Oh what perfection of power is this, in which the fierce torrent of the flooded river is thus in its full sweep shocked in twain, and made to stand up in an heap till the ransomed of the Lord shall have passed over! And all this is done with no effort, and with no machinery, saving that of the ordinary ark, with which all Israel had become familiar. "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty!" "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people, even for salvation with Thine anointed." The stars are obscured by the glory of the day, even the sun has its spots, but no one has ever yet seen even the beginning of shade on the perfect and awful brightness of Divine majesty. Not even the mightiest obstacles ever shew so much as the beginnings of difficulty to Him who is "Lord of all the earth." Shall we remember that when we are tempted, as many often are, to think salvation possible only in proportion as it seems free from hindrance? Some seem to want all the road paved, and the rivers bridged, in order to make their heaven accessible; they forget that nothing hinders God even for a moment. (*b*) God's glory is never for mere display. Men speak of God sometimes as though He sought to make known His glory merely for the honour of His own name. God's glory ever reveals itself in connection with His people's good. It is when Israel is in need that the sea divides, the manna falls, the Jordan parts asunder. When we speak of an "economy of power" in the Saviour's miracles, we are only saying in another form that God never does mighty works for the sake of Himself. Whenever, then, we behold any wonderful work of the Lord, let us look for its human occasion. (*c*) The same glory that encourages those who believe, is a terror to all who walk after "other gods." All the men on one side of the parted waters find a song in the mighty work of the Lord, which even for centuries afterwards animates the hearts of their children; all the people on the other side are appalled,—fear and pain take hold on them. How do we feel amid the most manifest works of God? To answer that enquiry faithfully may give us a clue to the state of our own hearts. Divine power to the three men on the plains of Dura was a trust and a joy, to Nebuchadnezzar it became a terror; to Paul it was a never-failing theme for song, it made Herod *the Sadducee* fear lest John the Baptist was *risen from the dead;* to the jailor of Philippi the earthquake was a thing of terror, but Paul and Silas sang praises to God. 2. *Think of the method of God in working for the salvation of His people.* The incident lays much stress on one feature which we are all prone to overlook—in the salvation of men it is not so much God's way to remove our hindrances as to help us to overcome them. The Israelites were brought to this river at the worst possible season of the year. The caverns of the mountains, filled by the latter rain, were emptying themselves, the snow was melting under the great heat by which those rains were followed, and thus Jordan overflowed "all his banks." God, who overlooks nothing, and times carefully the ways of His providence, selects these very days of the flooded river for the passage. What is this but His more ancient way of saying, "Through much tribulation ye must enter into the kingdom"? What is it but a clear revelation of the fact that trial is not arbitrary, but an occasion for helping His children, and of bringing terror and discomfiture to their enemies? It stands back here in the nursery volume written for the infant Church like a pictorial rendering of God's early and easy answer to man's grave and troubled and ever-recurring complaint—"He hath fenced up my way, that I cannot pass, and He hath set darkness in my paths." The fence is put about us, that we may learn to trust the love and power which will presently remove it; the darkness is in our paths, that we may learn to say in the moment when His presence appears through the departing gloom, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" II. **Entrance into the Promised Land can only be through the faith of men.** Even the mighty power of God would carry no man, woman, or

child over the river, and none would walk over but those who believed that the mass of water which gathered above them would be held back from sweeping them to destruction. 1. *The first steps of faith are often the most difficult to take.* When the waters were cut off, it would be comparatively easy for the priests to go on; it would need more courage to dip their feet boldly into "the brim of the water" which only began to yield as they began to tread onward seemingly into the depths. (*a*) It is so in the first steps of an unsaved man towards his God. It is hard to resolve, hard to decide, hard for men to commit themselves before the eyes of some one else to any decidedly Christian act. It is hard for a young man to begin prayer before godless companions who share his chamber. It was a trial to the Prodigal Son to take the first steps homeward; it would be comparatively easy, after the Father's embrace and kiss and welcome, to go onward in the new life. (*b*) Not less the first steps are the hardest to Christians who undertake special work for God. The first tract that is given; the first personal exhortation; the first effort to preach Jesus Christ to perishing men; Müller's first orphan house. 2. *Faith is salvation, even when it has fear.* Those who walked tremblingly across would be as safe as those who went confidently; those who had just faith enough to commit their way unto the Lord, although terror accompanied every step, would also, and equally with their bolder companions, enter into Canaan. It was thus on the night of the passover; if the father of the family had only sufficient faith to kill the lamb, and sprinkle the door-posts as directed, he might tremble, and even cry out like the Egyptians, as the destroying angel passed by, but he would be as safe as though he sang praises to God. Salvation is not in our freedom from trembling, but in Christ; if our faith only lead us to Him, He is the life. 3. *The faith of each is helped by the faith of all.* Shrieking priests would have made shrieking people; one trembling Israelite would have inflicted his fear on his neighbour. The firmness of the priests is confidence to the host, and the boldness of each courageous individual in the host was help and strength to all around him. "No man liveth unto himself." Our faith will help the faith of others; our doubt will not only dishonour God, but injure men. One of the difficulties at which infidels cavil in the doctrine of the resurrection is the distribution of the bodies of the dead into other life. Plants take up the elements of the bodies into vegetable life, and animal life takes up the same elements in consuming the plants. The same process is going on in the spiritual world; our personality overruns, and each man is taking up something of the being of his companions. Though God may not suffer our fear to destroy us, it may be ruinous to others. 4. *Faith, though weak in many, might well be firm in us all.* We look too much to the gathered heap of the waters, and at the time which it will take us to cross, and too little at the covenanted presence of God. McCheyne used to say, "For one look at self, take ten looks at Christ." We endure best, not as seeing ourselves, but "as seeing Him who is invisible," and of whose presence the death of the Saviour should give us sufficient assurance. This sublime scene of an *open way* quite across the Jordan is a true picture of the results of the work of Christ: there are no obstacles to our entrance into heaven, but such as are in our own hearts. III. **Entrance into the Promised Land under the Old Covenant forcibly and perhaps designedly illustrates our entrance into that New Covenant life which is through and beyond death.** (Cf. outline on verse 8.) Pulsford has said, "If the approach of Death awaken fear in you, tell Death that you are bringing the Lord Jesus along with you, and Death, like Jordan before the Ark, will put back, and a free passage will open before you into eternal life. 'What ailest thou, O sea, that thou fleest; and thou Jordan, that thou art driven back?' But hide Christ in thee *indeed;* for it will not serve to say, 'Lord, Lord.' The devils will leap upon thee, and prevail over thee, if the Lord Jesus be only on thy tongue, and not present, by His Holy Spirit, in thy soul. If He be in thee, who is the Light of Life, very Light and very Life, then, when the candle-light of thy body's life goes out, the Sun-light of thy soul's life shall be bright about thee." Let no one fear,

whose trust is in the Saviour; He who has been bread for us and water of life to us through the desert, who has given us "honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock," will not suffer us at last to be overwhelmed in Jordan.

## *SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verse 14.** DEVELOPMENTS IN DIVINE TEACHING.

The Pillar of Cloud had here given place to the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark becomes the one visible symbol of God's presence for the next four hundred and fifty years, and excepting at the end of that time, when it once more appears, as if in holy blessing of the new arrangements, the Cloud is seen no more in the days of the Old Covenant. (Cf. 1 Kings viii. 10, 11, etc.) In the days of the New Covenant it most significantly reappears on the Mount of Transfiguration, and at this time, also, seems present to consecrate, or rather to recognise before men as consecrated, a fresh development in the Divine plan of teaching and guiding the Church of the living God. The Cloud overshadows Moses, and in him the Law; Elijah, and in him the prophets; and presently departing, leaves visible to the representatives of the Church "Jesus only." Yet once again in the New Covenant, as if to put *the Divine mark* on that period in which men should see Him no more, it is the Cloud which receives the ascending Saviour out of sight, till that time when He shall reappear, still coming "in the clouds of heaven," and coming then with power and great glory. Thus the Pillar of Cloud is seen as the first manifestation of God's presence with His people, the Cloud gives place to the Ark, the Ark becomes absorbed in the Temple, of which Jesus said, "My Father's house," and the Temple, in its turn, makes way for the Church of the Cross. The Cloud which inaugurates all these forms of teaching reappears to bless them all, and receives the ascending Saviour up into glory; and although the Cloud now is not visible in its old form, Isaiah prophesied of these days of the Saviour's kingdom, "The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence." These changes in the outward form of God's plan of teaching or guiding His people, of which the removal of the Cloud is the first, naturally lead us to look for their reason and cause. Why should God reveal Himself differently to different ages, guiding some men by one form of manifestation, and some by another? **I. Developments in God's plan of teaching are a necessary accompaniment of human growth.** The books that are good for the boy of eight years of age are of little use to the youth of fifteen; yet it is with the elementary books that the child must begin. 1. *The Divine plan never shews over-teaching.* God has infinite pity for us in all the forms of our weakness, and His pity is not less when the weakness is in our understanding than when we are feeble in some other manner. The Divine gentleness begins with these liberated slaves, by shewing God in the imposing Pillar of Fire and Cloud, which is light in the darkness, and refreshing shade in the day; and when they are able to go on to something further, the same gentle care changes the form of communication. Jesus Christ shews us that the plan is still the same. He taught His apostles three years by mighty miracles, and by wonderful words from His own lips; then, as He was about to depart, He added, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now." Christ taught men, not as keeping in view His power to impart knowledge, but as ever having regard to their power to learn. So God has ever taught the world; He begins with it in its weakness, and raises the measure of its after lessons into fitness with its increasing powers of acquirement. 2. *The Divine plan, thus observed, shews wonderful patience and long-suffering.* Think of the centuries in which men have contem-

plated God in each of these several forms of manifestation, and how little they have seemed to learn. Yet God has waited patiently in each case, till men were ready to go on to the next new forms of truth. He has never grown weary, and closed the book of revelation altogether; it is still more glorious that, in His majestic self-control, He has never hurried His dull children from one form of communication till they were ready for the next. **II. The changes which occur in this development of God's plan of teaching are always** FROM THE SENSUOUS TO THE SPIRITUAL. The Ark had less of the supernatural about it than the Cloud. The Cloud was God-made and God-moved; men had made the Ark, and men carried it from place to place. In giving the Ark instead of the Cloud, God was withdrawing Himself gradually from the apprehension of the senses. The direction of this teaching was continually and unalterably the same till Christ came, saying to the woman of Samaria, "God is a Spirit," and to the woman of Magdala, "Touch me not." The fathers came "unto the mount that might be touched;" we are come "unto Mount Sion." 1. All teaching or worship that gives undue prominence to the sensuous is reactionary. It is crossing God's plan, it is turning back in the way of God's purposes. 2. All personal trials of faith should be accepted as honours conferred by God, or at least with a devout regard to His patience in the training of men generally. God looks about in the family of His children to see who can best bear the next lessons in walking by faith, and where He selects us for trial He also selects us for honour. Abraham's trial of faith was honourable, not simply because he proved faithful, but also because God chose him as the man who could best endure, and best lead his fellow-men a step onward in the Divine life. Even if we cannot welcome trial as an honour, we should remember God's long patience in teaching His people, and willingly and cheerfully take our part in leading men into the knowledge of His ways. 3. The high aim of every Christian should be to *trust in God*. This is the Divine ideal for the Church: let it be ours personally. **III. No change in the outward form of God's presence ever indicates less need of God, or shews less efficiency in His power to help His people.** 1. The presence of the Lord did not become less actual as it became less manifest. The Cloud might give place to the Ark, the Ark to the Temple, and the Temple to the living Church, but God was not most present when He was most seen. The wilderness was not more blessed with the Divine presence than the Church of the New Testament. Is not this true, also, in the personal experience of Christians? God is not with us least when we least behold Him nigh. 2. The power of the Lord did not become less mighty to save and to help as His presence became less visible to the senses. The dividing of the Jordan seems even more miraculous than the dividing of the Sea; the falling of the walls of Jericho shews an arm as potent to help as the rending of the rock at Horeb; the mighty works of Christ are transcended by nothing in the Old Testament; while the glories of Pentecost, when Christ had ascended up on high, seem absolutely to surpass everything that had gone before. Do not let us think that to have to "worship in the Spirit" means worshipping or waiting in weakness. Help, in the desert, may be more gross and material in its forms; it is not more glorious. Looking on the weak men who were about to forsake Him and flee, Christ said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father." To that prediction the first fulfilment came in Pentecost.

Verses 14, 15. The changes which God makes in His methods of teaching men are not because of any change in God; they are because of our altered circumstances, or different state of heart, or our fresh necessities. Thus is it that men find to guide them, now a Pillar of Cloud, and now an Ark.

The waters that roll between us and our possessions seldom shew signs of

making way for us till our feet are "dipped in the brim." It is not till the twelve apostles bear their few loaves to feed the thousands, that they find how much bread they carry. It is only when the withered arm tries to raise itself in obedience to the Saviour's bidding, that it finds itself healed of its infirmity. In the kingdom of the Lord, he who never attempts to perform what he cannot do, seldom does that which he might and ought.

God loves to bring us to our difficulties when they are at flood-tide, that we may not attempt to cross them without His help. God delights to help His children in their absolute necessities, that the remembrance of His love and power may be more abiding. Those whom God would largely help He suffers to be much hindered: He brings Israel to Jordan in its heaviest swellings, that nothing may effectually hinder them in the conflicts which are to come.

Verse 16. The passing over "right against Jericho" may teach us two things:—1. God helps His people over their difficulties, not that they may be out of difficulty, but that they may turn again to Him when difficulty comes next. "The *last* enemy that shall be destroyed is death," and no man need think his foes are all behind him till death also is in the rear. 2. God would have not only His children, but His enemies also, to behold His wonderful works. This is not that He wishes to destroy His enemies: He willeth not the death of any. He makes the hard heart to melt with fear, because fear alone can soften it. If out of fear His enemies will go on to faith, they too shall be received among and become His children, even as Rahab bears witness.

Verse 17. He who trusts God with the beginning of his salvation, may well trust Him for the end. As Bp. Hall has said, "The same hand that hath made the way hard, hath made it sure. He that hath made the wilderness comfortable, will make Jordan dry." The things which we most fear, our Father knows how to make most helpful. The mighty works of the Lord are not so much to excite our astonishment as to instruct our hearts; they are to teach us to know Him.

Verse 17. THE PRIESTS IN THE MIDST OF JORDAN; OR, MORAL FIRMNESS.

If we look at the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness as illustrating the journey of human life, the narrative before us will supply three facts concerning it:—1. *The future difficulty in life's journey.* The Jews in their journey had surmounted many difficulties, but there was one before them yet—the overflowing Jordan. So it is with us. The Jordan of death is before us all. The passage through it, to us, as to the Jews, is *strange, perilous, necessary;* we cannot reach Canaan without it. 2. *The true guide in life's journey.* God directed Joshua what the people were to do (ver. 7, 8). God guided them in two ways: (*a*) By the external symbol—the ark. (*b*) By human effort—"the priests." What the ark and the priests were to these men then, *Christianity and true teachers* are to humanity now; they are God's means of guiding us on our journey. A guide must know the way; God alone knows the winding and endless path of souls. 3. *The final deliverance in life's journey.* "All the people were passed clean over," etc. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." But the point to which we would now draw particular attention is the sublime calmness of these priests; they stood firm in the midst of the waters till all passed over. The circumstances suggest two remarks about their firmness. I. **That it was rational in its foundation.** What was its foundation? The answer to this question will enable us to see what moral firmness really is. 1. It was not stolid indifference. Some men are lauded for their composure, who ought to be denounced for their stoicism. 2. It was not confidence in their own power to keep back the mountain of water. 3. It was not, of course, faith in the laws of nature. All men have a fixed and practical faith in the laws of nature; the mariner, agriculturist, physician, etc., all trust these. But these men were firm in *defiance* of the laws of nature. It was the law of nature that the Jordan should roll on and whelm them in destruction. What, then, was the foundation of their firmness? The WORD OF GOD. God had told them, through Joshua, that they were thus to stand, and they would be safe (ver. 8, 13). Now our position is, *that it is more rational to trust the word of God than the laws of nature.* **First:** *Because His words bind Him to action, the laws of nature do not.* He may continue to act according to what are called the "laws of nature," or He may not. . . . . But His word allows Him no such option. The absolute rectitude of His being binds Him to carry it out. **Secondly:** *Because deviation from His word would be a far more serious thing to the universe, than deviation from the laws of nature.* He may reverse every natural law,

roll the wheels of nature backward, without infringing any moral principle, or injuring any sentient being. But were He to deviate from His word, what stupendous evils would ensue! Virtue would be at an end, moral government would be disobeyed, and the grand barrier between right and wrong, truth and error, heaven and hell, would be broken down, and anarchy and misery would deluge the moral creation. **Thirdly:** *Because He has departed from the laws of nature, but has never swerved an iota from His word.* The history of Moses, Elijah, Christ, furnishes numerous instances of deviation from the laws of nature, but the history of the universe, from its earliest dawn, supplies not a single instance of deviation from His word. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," *etc.*

Two inferences necessarily flow from the foregoing considerations: 1. *That it is more reasonable to walk by faith than by sight.* Our senses and our reason deceive us; sense and reason have deceived millions, but the word of God is infallible. 2. *That apparent impossibilities can never be pleaded against Divine predictions.* There are, especially, two works predicted in the Bible, which sceptical men declare impossible—*The entire evangelization of the world, and the resurrection of the dead.* But the question is, has God predicted them? If so, the idea of impossibility is an absurdity. With Him "all things are possible."

The other fact which the circumstances before us suggest in relation to the moral firmness of these priests, is—**II. That it was salutary in its influence.** The firmness of these priests in the midst of Jordan, with the billows piled above them, inspired the thousands of Israel to follow. Had one of these priests displayed, in that terrible situation, the least excitement or fear, would it not have struck a panic through all the assembled tribes, so that they would not have ventured to the brink? But seeing the priests standing sublimely calm, they were braced with courage to step into the fearful channel and pursue their way (ver. 17).

This incident suggests two thoughts:—First: *The force of human influence.* All Israel now follows these men. Men are made to follow their superior brethren. The millions of every age follow the few. Secondly: *The philosophy of useful influence.* The influence of these priests was useful, because they were following God. Fidelity to God is the spring of useful influence. Brother, the Jordan of death is before thee, cold, dark, and tumultuous. Take courage from the example of the brave men who, trusting in God, have stood firmly in its midst, and crossed it safely. Follow them who 'through faith and patience inherit the promises.'" [*Dr. Thomas: Homilist*, vol. iii. 334.]

## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE PASSAGE OF THE JORDAN, AND ITS MEMORIAL.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**2. Take you twelve men**] These had been already chosen for the work. The twelfth verse in chap. iii. is not to be regarded as misplaced, but as a brief record of the notice then given to prepare the men to whom reference is again made here. Ver. 4 plainly recognises this previous selection. **3. Where the priests' feet stood firm**] The stones were to be taken as nearly as possible from this spot, that the monument might be more vivid in its appeal to memory and reflection. **4. Out of every tribe a man**] The unity of the twelve tribes was to be preserved in one memorial. The very river which should afterwards separate the eastern tribes from the western, should furnish from its bed the materials for a memorial which should bind Israel together in the recollection of a mercy common to all its families. **5. Pass over before the Ark**] Probably these twelve selected men had remained behind the Ark, on or towards the eastern bank, during the crossing of the multitude. When the people had all passed over, Joshua commanded these twelve men to take each a stone, and precede the Ark out of the river. As the Ark had been first in entering the river, so it should be last in leaving, that the power from the beginning to the end of the miracle might be manifestly of God. **Upon his shoulder**] This indicates that each stone was to be as large as one man could conveniently carry. **9. In the midst of Jordan**] Dr. Kennicott's proposal to read "FROM the midst," instead of "IN the midst," seems to have no support in the best MSS. Joshua appears to have erected this separate memorial in the ordinary channel of the river; and Calvin suggests that it could probably be seen when the "swellings of Jordan" subsided. If it be asked, "Would not the first rush of the waters, which had gathered during the passage of the Israelites, sweep the memorial away?" it may be answered that the Divine power, which had for so long kept the waters back, would also be able to guide them past these twelve stones. **12. Before the children of Israel**] The usual order of marching was thus broken, that their promise, given in Numb. xxxii. 17, might be faithfully observed. **13. About forty thousand**] This left about seventy thousand men fit to bear arms, besides women and children, who did not pass over. The total number of the two and a half tribes who remained behind probably amounted to between three and four hundred thousand. **19. Gilgal**] According to Josephus (Antiq. v. 1. 4), Gilgal was fifty furlongs from Jordan, and ten from Jericho. **20. Pitch in Gilgal**] "Heb., erect, rear up" (Bush). "It is very

likely that a base of mason-work was erected, of some considerable height, and that the twelve stones were placed on the top of it" (A. Clarke). 24. **All the people of the earth**] The Israelites and the various peoples of the land. Even the idolatrous Canaanites, and any of the heathen who might in after years see these stones, were to learn from them that Israel's God was a God of might. To the close of the twenty-third verse, the parents are represented as speaking to their children; in the twenty-fourth verse Joshua gives the reason for this instruction, and points out the object for which the memorial was to be erected.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1—9.

### Remembrance of God through His Works.

An American gentleman, speaking very recently to a meeting of Christian people assembled in London on the occasion of opening some new buildings as a college for ministerial students, said, "I have been, during the last day or two, looking at some of the national monuments in your great metropolis, and almost every one seemed to me like an eloquent page in your conspicuous national history." All current history may be said, in one respect, to be merely a monumental record; it perpetuates only the things which are most prominent. History, in the ordinary meaning of the word, is made up of great events and conspicuous lives. The principal events in the lives of principal men are written down; to these are added the chief events which belong to a nation or people, taken collectively, and the result is called "history." Perhaps it is the best thing of the kind for which men can either find time or make room. And yet a mere record of great battles, chief men, and conspicuous parliamentary measures, is in many respects very unsatisfactory. The view which it gives is rather distorted than correct; and just as a drawing of a mansion which only set forth to view the tallest chimneys, the largest windows, and the most prominent features would be a poor picture, so history is poor and misleading if we forget to bring to it a good knowledge of human nature and human life, and to fill in, by the help of imagination, some of the numerous blanks which are necessarily there. We have only a partial history of *the Lord's mercies:* they are "new every morning," and where we cannot even count correctly, it is hardly likely that we shall truthfully record. God only asks His people to remember what they can. Comparatively, it is only here and there a monument which He bids His children erect. In the "sweet reasonableness" of His pity for our weakness, He did but bid His servant write, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget *not all* His benefits."

The subject set forth in these verses teaches—I. **Man's forgetfulness of God and God's works.** This direction to build a monument, to perpetuate the memory of the miracle, is a recognition of our liability to suffer even the mightiest of the Lord's works to pass out of mind. 1. *The occasion of our forgetfulness is often found in the pressure of earthly duties.* But for the specific command of God, it seems quite possible that the day on which the Jordan was crossed might have been thought too crowded with necessary duties to leave any time to prepare for the erection of a memorial. Think of having to get two millions or more of people over a river divided in this manner. Many of them would be timid and shrinking, many of them were children, who would have to be carried over a rough or muddy path, and up steep banks; and though, saving Caleb and Joshua, no man in the host would be over sixty years of age, yet in so vast a company there must have been many sick and feeble, who would have needed assistance in crossing. Added to all this, there was the enormous task of transporting to the other side the tents and effects of the people, and all their cattle. If, as many are but too ready to believe, there are ever days when religious duties may be neglected because of the pressure of secular claims, this day must have been one of them. It is with both instruction and reproof that this passage should be read by most of us; this day of pressing secular duties is also a day of urgent religious service. How commonly do we meet with people who seem to have no time for perpetuating their

memory of God's mercies; they have no time for prayer, no time for public worship, no time for religion. To be in harmony with itself, a life like that ought to have no time for death. "Time and Eternity," said Pulsford, "both touch me, for I am both. Time assaults me for the dust which I have, and insists that I give back to the dust every atom which I have derived therefrom. Eternity appeals to me for the spirit which I have. Owing to these two claimants, the partnership will soon have to be dissolved between my soul and body, that Earth may take its own, and Eternity its own." No man, be he ever so busy, can postpone for a single day the claims of eternity. Would it not be wise to make room for the claims of religion "while it is called to-day"? This pressure of business makes the pressure of religious need still more urgent, not less. The very fact that life is "so fast," tends to blot out from the mind our memory of God and His merciful works. It is said that Luther, the hard-worked reformer, complained that the duties of life pressed him so heavily that he could not perform them without having three or four hours in each day set apart for prayer. Havelock, the busy soldier, is said to have risen every morning two hours before commencing his military duties, that he might spend them in communion with his God. 2. *The real cause of our forgetfulness of God is ever* IN THE HEART. The natural powers of our memory are strong enough to retain good recollection of things which we love. Cardinal Mezzofanti, who was the son of a carpenter at Bologna, and who died less than thirty years since, is said to have acquired his first knowledge of languages by listening to scraps of Latin and Greek, heard through the open casement of a schoolroom window, near which he often worked. To many of the boys within, the tasks were no doubt irksome enough; but the stolen waters were sweet to the poor lad who could not pay for such learning. He went on acquiring knowledge from the very love of it, till at the age of seventy he could converse in upwards of fifty languages, besides possessing some acquaintance with at least twenty more. If men only loved God as they love some earthly objects and pursuits, they would need few stone memorials to keep Him or His works in mind. Bad memory is usually owing to bad interest and poor attention. The heart needs setting right, and then the mind would not often be wrong. 3. *The forgetfulness of God's merciful works is a sure indication that we have forgotten God.* A man may repeat the Apostles' Creed week by week, or join with devout exterior in the worship of the Free Churches; but if he forgets God's mercies, no weekly public service, let him engage in it as heartily as he may, is sufficient to contradict the six days of testimony that he has forgotten God. **II. God's gracious interest in man's remembrance of His works.** 1. *The Scriptures are full of Divine complaints and solicitations on this matter of human forgetfulness.* God speaks as if man's ingratitude wounded and pained Him. How pathetic are some of the words in which the Lord reminds men of their neglect. If an ungrateful heart were not invariably so hard, men might be moved to tears to read thoughtfully, as from the lips of Him who made heaven and earth, such words as those spoken through Hosea—"Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples;" or, "She went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the Lord." How humanly they read, and how real the pain of them seems; how they seem to tell of a heart balanced and poised between the dignity that feels so worthy of better regard that it may justly punish, and the love which is so deep and tender that it cannot forsake. A keen observer of human nature said—

> "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
> To have a thankless child."

We read some of these complaints from the Divine lips; and so real is the parental relation in which God stands to His people, that they come to us in all the tenderness and pain and pathos which pervade a natural cry from the wounded heart of an earthly father. Let us seek to possess an observant eye to the goodness of the Lord, and to cultivate a spirit of praise for His manifold mercies.

"Some murmur when their sky is clear,
And wholly brought to view,
If one small speck of dark appear
In their great heaven of blue;
And some with thankful love are filled,
If but one streak of light,
One ray of God's good mercy gild
The darkness of their night.

"In palaces are hearts that ask,
In discontent and pride,
Why life is such a dreary task,
And all good things denied;
And hearts in poorest huts admire
How Love has, in their aid,
With care that never seems to tire,
Such rich provision made."—*Trench.*

**2.** ***Although our remembrance can be but a small thing to God, He well knows that it is everything to us.*** However base our ingratitude may appear in His sight, our praise could be but a few strains the less in the mighty song of the universe. It is because of God's love to us, and of His knowledge that our forgetfulness of His works must leave us to destruction, that He so graciously manifests this interest in our thankfulness. 3. *He knows that His works are our only sufficient interpretation of Himself.* Even Jesus Christ, who has been seen in the flesh, needs His mighty and merciful works to make Him known to men. He "went about doing good," speaking gracious words, doing benevolent miracles, and thus we learn of Him who must otherwise be an abstraction. We want the cradle, and the life, and the cross, to expound the Saviour. So he who never reads God's works, and above all His unspeakable gift of Jesus, can never have anything more for his religion than a superstition, and nothing more as an object of worship than a theological abstraction called Deity. **III. The condescension in which God graciously meets men in this infirmity of their forgetfulness.** 1. *He allows them to help their memory through things which are visible.* A man ought to be able to remember his mother without a monument; much more should he remember Him who said, "Can a woman forget?" etc. Yet God deigns to say, "Put up the stones, and try and keep Me and My mercy in mind by the help of these." 2. *He points out such helps to memory as are most suitable.* (*a*) The stones were to be taken from the very spot where the priests had stood. God condescends not only to allow His people a monument; they may have one so vivid, that, as far as possible, it shall recall the whole scene. (*b*) The twelve stones were to be taken out of the river, and carried to Gilgal, by one man from each tribe. The tribes would soon be divided by the river. It only wants something to separate men, and forthwith they grow clannish. A highway, a hedge, an idea, a dozen sticks, any small line, is often enough to divert human feeling into channels, and make the quarrelsome take sides. By this selection of a man from each tribe, God virtually says, "I will not only have your remembrance vivid, but I will have the praise of all Israel to be as the song of one man. Take, from the very river that will soon separate you, the materials for a memorial of thankfulness in which all your hearts may be knit together, and knit together in Me." 3. *These material helps, given to His early people, were given by God to teach a principle and to cultivate a habit.* It was not merely now and then, when some mighty work was wrought on their behalf, that they were to pile up a few stones and occasionally go and inspect them, that this command was given. By this God would teach all men to definitely mark heavenly mercies, and cultivate the habit of thanksgiving for all His manifest help. The lesson was written also for our admonition. Some people contemn the habit of having special services which mark *the lapse of time.* "Watch-night services," special appeals on the occasion of a new year, and even the worship of the Lord's day, have provoked remarks like the following:—"These things are all very well; but men ought to be religious and devout all the year

round, and all the week through." It is enough to answer, "The man who finds no special appeal made to his heart by peculiar seasons like these, is seldom very devout at any period." It is natural, and the Divine teaching supports our human feeling, when we give emphasis to our praise where God has set special marks to His mercy. The *conspicuous events of social life* should find us setting up memorials in our hearts. Anniversaries of deaths, marriages, births, of business prosperity or failure, may well call for their corresponding stress of thought and worship in our religious life. Anniversaries of *spiritual experiences* should, above all, be times of memorial. He who has no special prayers and special songs will probably have few ordinary ones which are useful to himself or acceptable to God. He who spread the table of His supper for our help, and said, "Do this in remembrance of Me," will love to see us finding in this memorial of the greatest work of God for man the devout recognition of the principle that all peculiar mercies demand our special praise.

TEACHING THE CHILDREN.—*Verses* 6, 7.

In the formation of the liberated Hebrews into a nation, most significant prominence is given, from the very beginning, to the religious education of their children. The godly nation was to be made by teaching godliness to its sons and daughters The fathers proved rebellious, and were left to die in the wilderness; the hope of Israel was in its children, and it was left for them to enter into the inheritance, and to commence the national life in its more consolidated form. Divine care was shewn concerning the children from the first. Even before the people left Egypt, the very rite which commemorated the exodus was pointed and emphasised in the direction of the children. The ordinance of the Passover was to be perpetual, that when the children should ask their parents, "What mean ye by this service?" they might be taught to fear, and love, and praise, and trust the God of their fathers' deliverance. The sojourn in the desert is marked by repeated injunctions concerning the pious training of the young. The words of the Lord were to be taught to the children diligently, to be written even on the doorposts of the houses, and on the gates (Deut. xi. 18—21); and in a great septennial gathering in the year of release, at the feast of tabernacles, the words of the law were to be read and expounded, that any who had been neglected in servitude, that the "children who had not known anything," and all the people, might learn to fear the Lord. In the miracle which makes a way through Jordan for entering into the long-deferred possession, equal stress is laid on teaching the children: as in the exodus, so here, the teaching of the young is *the first thing for which provision is made.* God's hope of the nation is seen taking shape and form through hope in the families, and His hope in the families through religious training *in childhood.* Perhaps these early histories, in this aspect, ought to give more alarm to people who have grown up into manhood and womanhood "without God in the world," than any other part of the Scriptures. Men and women sin away half or three parts of a lifetime, and contemplate repenting before they get too old, and before they die. Taking these urgent injunctions, which are written as in capital letters on the very face of the miracles which lead out of bondage and into Canaan, and reading them in the light of the overthrow of the fathers in the wilderness, it seems as though even God were half hopeless of genuine piety in those who grow well into maturity without the knowledge and fear and love of Himself.

Dealing rather with modern necessities than with ancient details, we may consider the subject of parental training in two principal aspects:—I. Some mistakes which we are apt to make. 1. *Perhaps we are too ready to assume, that the children of Christian parents will become Christians.* Saved ourselves, it becomes easy, in the bustle of daily life, almost to take it for granted that our children will be saved also. True, we Christian parents teach our children; we are not Antinomians, and we believe that if they are to be saved we must train

them. True, we pray for our children; it is right and it is pleasant to remember before the Lord these who are so dear to us. But is this real, or do we suffer it to become perfunctory? Do we realize that our children *may be lost?* We believe that *some* children grow up to be bad men and godless women, and that many of these die out of Christ, and perish. Our Christian convictions and our whole Christian work are grounded upon this. Then it ought not to be thought sensational to ask, Have we realized that our dear children may thus perish? Have we carried our awful convictions about the children of other people to the case of our own dear boy or beloved girl? To what holy patience and perseverance and effort and prayer would such a realization lead. What is meant by those dark pictures in the Bible about the children of godly parents? What are we to gather from the histories which tell us of the wickedness of the children of Eli, of Samuel, of David, of Hezekiah? What are we to learn from these? Many have looked on them as a ground for serious discouragement, and yet that cannot be the reason why they are written down for our reading. Matthew Henry says of the two thieves at the crucifixion, "One was saved, that no man might despair; the other was lost, that none might presume." Should we not also read, The children of some godly parents are saved, that no Christian father or mother may despair; the children of some of the best O. T. saints seem lost, that no one may take it for granted that his children will be saved. Piety does not run in the blood, nor is grace always hereditary. 2. *Many make the mistake of supposing that a child must grow up into maturity before its conversion will probably take place.* The *possibility* of early conversion is generally admitted; as a matter of fact, many parents do not *expect* it in their own children while they are children. Some seem to take it for granted that there will most likely be a previous course of open connection with the world, that presently conversion will come with a kind of manifest jerk, and that then it will probably be genuine. A most unhealthy spirit seems in recent years to have grown up among some of the most earnest evangelical workers, in respect to the prominence given to cases of conversion after a long course of sin. It would be unfair, as some have rather recklessly asserted, to say that children have been received into the Church "with suspicion;" it is only too true that people have got to behave as if it were comparatively a small thing to be saved young, and something for endless parade when a bad man of forty or fifty years of age is brought to the Saviour. It is an occasion for joy, and great joy, when such as the latter are led to Christ; it cannot but be a matter for sorrow, when they are almost taught to feel as if there were some special merit in not having become Christians before, and when they are supposed to be authorities as to what is the proper measure of Christian zeal and holiness in proportion to the wickedness of their own previous lives. Instead of such men being helped to know that it is a thing for humiliation and a cause for modesty that they have served sin so long and so deeply, they are led to think that preaching to other people, and teaching even Christians whose lives have been a holy training, is the natural outcome and prerogative of their previous and long-continued wickedness. The way in which "converted prize-fighters," or "converted colliers," or "converted chimney-sweeps" have been handed round, as if they were a kind of specially burnished jewel worthy of the profound attention of the Christian public, has, during late years, been a fit cause for considerable shame. To say nothing of the comparative neglect which Christian children and youths must have sometimes been made to feel, or of the premium tacitly put on a previous life of wickedness, the serious harm done to these people themselves ought to have led Christian men to keep them more decently in the background. The temptations given to vanity and self-esteem, in some cases, might well have been fatal even to a trained Christian life; how could it be expected that such feeble uprightness could endure so severe a strain in the direction of the old and chronic crookedness? What wonder if "the sow that was washed has turned again to her wallowing in the mire," when men in

authority have made the heat of temptation unbearable even to acclimatised feeling and habit, and then have driven some newly cleansed one straight in the direction of the mud? 3. *There is a temptation to make the teaching of children interesting rather than substantial.* Too interesting it never can be made, so long as love of the pleasant and the cheerful does not impair the quality of the truth imparted. Has it been wise to give up the old methods of catechisms, and learning verses and hymns? Are not many trusting more *to impressions*, scratched lightly in with the point of an anecdote or picture, rather than to that deeper graving in of truth on the mind which used to be customary? The story of the cross and of the Saviour's love should be cut deeply into the memory, as well as be made pleasant to the heart for the time in which it is being heard. Impressions are very fleeting, and most of us soon forget them, but well-learned words come up even in after years, and repeat the impressions again.

**II. Some encouragements which we are tempted to forget.** 1. *The work has God's command.* No Israelite had any need to fear that he would be doing wrong in an earnest endeavour to lead his children to God. The memorial was for the teaching of all the people and all their children. We need none of us feel that we are presuming, in any efforts which we may make to lead our children to the Saviour. No man is made to feel that God would not welcome his children also. On this point we cannot apply the commands of Scripture to the wrong family. We cannot get the wrong child in any family. Whatever truth there may be in election, we never have to read, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and if he happen to be one of the elect, he shall not depart from it." With such encouragement, every one may and should bring up his children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." A lady, it is said, once told Archbishop Sharpe that she would not communicate religious instruction to her children until they had grown to years of discretion; she received an answer from the prelate no less true than blunt, as he replied, "Madam, if you do not teach them, the devil will." 2. *The work to which every parent is thus commanded is full of promise.* It has the promise of nature. Most training, when wisely and perseveringly pursued, does succeed. The obedient vine and tree, which yield to the gardener; the dog, who learns from his shepherd; the horse and the ox, that learn to obey their trainers; all these preach encouragement. If the Christian training of children be more difficult, it has, to meet that, the higher stimulus of the promise of God. God co-operates with the pious parent. This memorial was a Divine suggestion, and carried in itself the promise to every pious Jew that he should be a "worker together with God." The promises are unto us and to ours also, if we are Christian parents; and if we have not that necessary qualification, our first duty is to seek Christ for ourselves. Do we go to this work, feeling as we do it that God works with us? 3. *The work has an eternal and glorious reward* To the faithful parent it would not be right to say that it *may have* such a reward; surely it *must have.* We can hardly think of a holy and persevering labour of faith for our own children as fruitless at last. It cannot be that a life of faith and prayer and wise labour shall ever fail here. But Christian parents may have to wait long; it may be that they will not even live to see their children brought to Christ. If we can be patient anywhere, surely we may be for our children's salvation. It is said that when Kepler, the immortal astronomer of Wurtemburg, who discovered the laws of the motions of the planets, lay dying, he was asked by a friend whether he did not suffer cruelly to be obliged to depart without seeing his discoveries appreciated. He answered, "My friend, God has waited five thousand years till one of His creatures discovered the admirable laws which He has given to the stars; why should I, then, not wait till justice is done to me?" We might all well labour on in the beautiful spirit of that reply. How long, in many cases, does God patiently wait for the salvation of the parents themselves; remembering that, they may well wait before Him for their children. But to earnest prayer, wise training, and holy faith, the reward cannot but come eventually. Let us

lead our children to Christ. Though it may not be before, yet when we are dead and gone, when the coffin and the grave contain all that is left of us to earth, when the clods of the valley cover our heads, and years of fled time have in many minds obliterated our memory, still shall our children remember that they once had Christian and then have glorified parents. Thoughts of a holy life and earnest prayers will follow them, even in the way of sin; and when the sacred beacon of our past rises, like another star of the East, to guide them to Him who was born in Bethlehem, that memory of Christian father and godly mother will be for ever a shrined and holy thing in our children's hearts. It will go with them in their own Christian life, recollected as their noblest birthright, and cherished as a princely heritage. With our own Cowper, they may think of us and sing—

> "My boast is not that I deduce my birth
> From loins enthroned, and rulers of the earth;
> But higher far my proud pretensions rise,
> The son of parents passed into the skies."

## *SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verses 1, 2.** "The command of chap. iii. 12 is reported in that place, because it was given by Joshua at that time. The election of twelve men by the people would have been impossible whilst they were crossing, though, after they were chosen, Joshua could easily explain to them, whilst the rest were passing over, what they were to do. The twelve men were elected by the people, that they might act as their representatives, and be witnesses of the miracles which were about to be wrought at their passage through the river."—*Keil.*

### Bearing Witness to the Works of the Lord.

**I. God's witnesses are carefully prepared beforehand.** Memorials of God's wonderful works and great mercies had for some time been contemplated. A command in relation to them had been given by Moses (cf. Deut. xxvii. 2). This commandment was partially obeyed on this very day of the passage, and fully at Mount Ebal (chap. viii. 30—32). The men who were to prepare for this particular memorial at Gilgal had been already selected. They were to be stationed close to the spot where the waters were divided; and while the multitude "hasted and passed over," they could stand during the whole time and watch this marvellous work, reporting it afterwards each man to his own tribe. God graciously prepares the testimony of those things which He would have most surely believed among us. For centuries before He came, the prophets bare witness unto Christ. Jesus Himself told His disciples of things to come, that when these came to pass they might believe. Peter speaks to those in the house of Cornelius of "witnesses *chosen before of God*, who did eat and drink with Christ after He rose from the dead." Elsewhere the same apostle says, "We were eye-witnesses of His majesty." In the testimony of the Lord's marvellous works and mercies, nothing is left to accident. **II. God's witnesses are so prepared as to merit the confidence of men.** In this case they were chosen by the people from among themselves. They were not priests or Levites, who might afterwards be suspected, from motives of interest, of having coloured the report to keep up the good name of the Ark. 1. *The witnesses to the truth of the Scriptures demand our confidence.* Many of them were men who sacrificed much for the truth's sake. Who can venture to cast suspicion on such men as Moses, who "forsook Egypt;" or Jeremiah, whose life was one long persecution; or Elijah, who seemed alone in his fidelity, and whose grief in the desert is told with such evident truthfulness? What a life of testimony, ever bearing witness of itself while testifying of the Saviour, is the life of Paul! Think of his self-sacrifice, of his persecutions, of his boldness, his manifest integrity, his exemplary life, and

of the unmeditated coincidences of his letters as shewn in Paley's Horæ Paulinæ. 2. *The witnesses to the truth since the days of the apostles have been also eminently worthy of the faith of men.* (*a*) Many Christians have been men of holy and self-denying lives; men who have done great services or given much in sacrifice for their fellows; men whose death has been a confirmation of their own previous testimony. (*b*) There is the witness given by poetry, painting, music, and literature contributed by many who have made no profession of attachment to the gospel. The noblest inspirations of men have been drawn from the Bible, and have thus borne testimony at least to its elevated character and holy power. (*c*) There is the witness of the enemies of the gospel. Literature abounds with concessions and expressions of admiration in which avowed unbelievers have borne their witness to Christ and His word. Few will suspect these of any interested motives. (*d*) There is the witness of Christian societies and Christian work. When men look at the fruits which the tree of truth has ever borne, and is still bearing, they read testimony which surely is worthy of some confidence: missionary societies and schools; hospitals and poor laws, both of which sprang from the Church. **III. God's witnesses are so placed that they can speak with authority.** These men were near to the Ark, and to the scene of the miracle. They could tell what they saw with the claim that belonged to men who had possessed good opportunities for information. The apostles repeatedly insisted on their qualifications in similar respects. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes . . . . declare we unto you," said John. Think of the power in which these men were qualified to speak, when they stood up to bear witness, "beginning at Jerusalem" amongst the very men who could best sift their evidence, and whose malice and desire to vindicate themselves would lead them to deny anything which could be denied. **Let us learn that no word of God is to be received lightly.** Dr. Bushnell says, "A suit upon a note at hand had long been pending in one of the courts of our commonwealth, payment of which was resisted on the ground that it was and must be a forgery, no such note having ever been given. But the difficulty in the trial was to make out any conclusive evidence of what the defending party knew to be the truth. His counsel was, in fact, despairing utterly of success; but it happened that just as he was about closing his plea, having the note in his hand, and bringing it up so that the light struck through, his eye caught the glimpse of a mark in the paper. He stopped, held it up deliberately to the light, and behold, the name, in water-mark, of a company that had begun the manufacture of paper after the date of the instrument! Here was evidence without going far to seek it; evidence enough to turn the plaintiff forthwith into a felon, and consign him, as it did, to a felon's punishment." The truth of God's word has also the witness in itself; although its water-mark is one, not which disproves, but which strikingly confirms, its own utterances. This "man of our counsel" has the aspect of truth in every feature, and may well be felt to speak with indisputable authority. **IV. Those who bear witness for God now should also seek to make their testimony unimpeachable.** There is still room for holy and disinterested and self-sacrificing lives. These will impress most men more than argument, and more than eloquence. To all Christians the word is spoken still, "Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord."

Verse 1, first clause. THE COMPLETENESS AND DELIBERATENESS OF GOD'S WORKS.

**I. The effectual working of Divine power.** "All the people were clean passed over Jordan." Not one of the mighty host whose inheritance lay on the other side of the river was left behind. 1. *Divine power was sufficient to cover all human weakness.* Some of the people would be infirm, some infants, some sick and diseased; all passed over nevertheless. So in our passage to the

inheritance above, God's power not only meets the case of the spiritually strong, it equally covers the need of those who are spiritually feeble. The gospel of our JOSHUA, also, is a gospel for the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind. When Moses stood before Pharaoh previous to the exodus, Pharaoh spoke as if he had made a great concession when he said, "Let your little ones also go with you." Moses answered him, "Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind." Brave words were those, for one man to dauntlessly speak in the face of a despot, and they were as beautiful in their significance as they were bold in their spirit. Nothing of the Lord's was to be left in the land of the idolater. The power of God should be found sufficient to bring out every one of the cattle also. 2. *Divine power was sufficient to cover all difficulties and obstacles.* God not only parted the waters, but held them parted till all the people were clean passed over. Not less "the effectual working of His power" proves sufficient for all obstacles in the path of His children now. **II. The absolute sufficiency of Divine mercy.** All passed clean over. The fathers had died in the wilderness, for mercy must punish sin, lest all suffer destruction. Justice is more passive than active in the matter of punishment for transgression; it is the attribute which proclaims that punishment is right and due. It is Mercy that applies punishment. It is Jesus Christ with tears in His eyes who says over Jerusalem, "The days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee." So, for the sake of the living, Mercy had sorrowfully smitten and buried the fathers in the wilderness. But the children were completely forgiven. They, too, had sinned deeply and long. The plains of Moab were close by; the people had grievously erred there, but Divine mercy is equal to the occasion, and it is from those very plains of Moab that the people pass over. Every one enters in; not only Phinehas and Joshua and Caleb, but the forgiven sinners also. How complete and beautiful is the pardon of the Lord! No man may tamper with sin, for even Mercy stands weeping by the graves of the dead which her own hands have slain; all the more glorious is it to see that where Mercy once forgives she has no memory whatever of the past. While the people clean pass over, she utters not a single upbraiding to any one of them all.

"Kind hearts are here, yet would the tenderest one
Have limits to its mercy; God has none;
But man's forgiveness may be true and sweet,
When yet he stoops to give it: more complete
Is love that lays forgiveness at thy feet,
And pleads with thee to raise it. Only heaven
Means crowned, not vanquished, when it says, Forgiven."

*A. A. Proctor.*

**III. The majestic deliberateness of Divine methods.** Four hundred and seventy years before God made a covenant with Abram, saying, "Unto thy seed have I given this land." At the same time the four centuries which were previously to elapse were predicted as years to be spent in Egypt, many of which were to be years of bondage and affliction. At the end of four hundred and thirty years, not a day had been lost in the Divine count of time (cf. Ex. xii. 40, 41; Gal. iii. 17). Then the Israelites sin in the desert, and calmly and patiently God takes forty more years to blot out the evil of this transgression. Slowly and painfully, and often solemnly, these days of the wilderness go by, God working miracles, shewing mercy, and bearing His people all the way. Here at the end of the time—four days before the end, for His mercy loves to discount the bill of our suffering—God divides the river, and leads the people into the land. How calm, how deliberate, how patient, how stately, is the slow, sure march of God in this working for His people's good! 1. *The natural processes in the cure of human sinfulness and weakness are slower than men usually estimate, and God does not hurry them.* It took four thousand years for fallen man to become ready for the cross; then, "*in due time*, Christ died for the ungodly." It took over thirty years for

the Saviour, in His way from Bethlehem to Calvary, to leave the influences and words and works necessary for the salvation of men; at the end of this period He prays, saying, "Father, the hour is come." So the time from the cross to Pentecost, from Pentecost to the last words of the solitary man of Patmos, ere he sits down to write the gospel which closes Divine revelation, seems long. God's way has no hasty miles. 2. *The slowness of God's method is never for lack of pity and mercy.* Scripture calls the Divine waiting "long-suffering," a word which means not simply long patience, but also long pain. So we read of this waiting in the desert, "Forty years long was I grieved," etc. The bearing of God, while He waits, shews that His deliberateness and slowness are never for lack of mercy. Think of the manna falling in the wilderness on the days of Israel's great sins! Manna on the morning of Korah's rebellion; manna and the brazen serpent in one day; manna from heaven and a calf for a god on earth; think of it, and see how God's slow methods and great mercies go on together!

**The magnitude of the miracle.**—"This seems to us a more signal miracle than the passage of the Red Sea; and it appears as if expressly framed, not only to effect its own objects, but to relieve the other from all naturalistic interpretations. In connection with the Red Sea passage, we hear travellers and scholars talk learnedly about east winds and tides and shallows, so that, whether intentionally or not, the fact, as a demonstration of Divine power, is explained away or attenuated. But nothing of this is possible in the case of the passage of the Jordan. The fact must be taken as it stands. It was a miracle, or it was nothing. There has not been, and there cannot be, any explanation of it on natural grounds. And if, therefore, men are obliged to admit this, it becomes scarcely worth their while to tamper with the Red Sea miracle—unless they would deny the authority of the narrative altogether." [*Kitto.*]

Verses 3—5. "OBJECTIVE TEACHING."

**I. We see God developing the spirit of enquiry.** The Lord loves to set His children problems. This is not to perplex them, but to teach them. Men everywhere may hear Him saying, "SEEK, and ye shall find." His way is to stand up before men strange objects, and so to set them asking questions. 1. *God takes this way in Nature.* We are to "lift up our eyes on high," and reverently to enquire, "What meanest Thou by these stars? Who hath created these things?" In the depths below, where "He putteth forth His hand upon the rock," marking it here with the footprints of extinct animals, there with the rain-drift, and piling it elsewhere in strange formations of strata, we are to behold that which shall prompt our devout question, "What meanest Thou by these stones?" There is no thunder in which we may not hear "the voice of the Lord;" no lightning of which we may not enquire concerning the laws of electricity, and thus find out in a deeper sense how "His brightness is as the light." Nature is full of wonders; strange forms stand up in all her fields to provoke the spirit of investigation within us. 2. *It is the same in providence.* The wicked prosper, and the righteous fail; and this has set men asking questions ever since the days when David wrote the thirty-seventh Psalm, and he or some one else the seventy-third, not to speak of earlier bewilderment. Why do babies die? Why do our boys and girls just get our whole being entwined around their own, and then suddenly pass from us? Broken-hearted fathers and mothers, for centuries, have been walking into grave-yards, looking at little graves and "broken columns," and have cried out in anguish, "What meanest Thou by THESE stones?"

> "Only a baby's grave,
> A foot or two at the most
> Of star-daisied sod.
> Yet methinks that God
> Knows what that little grave cost."

So intense have been the questions; so soft and trustful, as the case has had to be referred back to Him, have been at least some of the answers. Sudden sickness or calamity blasts the hopes of a life which hence-

forth drags on in pain; appalling accidents slay their thousands, and fierce diseases their ten thousands, and men and women who are left bow their heads low, hardly lifting them for a time, saving in the energy that asks with such terrible earnestness, "Why is this? Wherefore am I dealt with thus?" 3. *It is so hardly less in the Scriptures.* The hardened heart of Pharaoh here, slaughtered Canaanites there; the origin of evil, the mysteries of the fall; federal responsibilities and privileges; sovereignty over, and accountability in, the will; vicarious burdens, pain, and death; atonement, its effect; punishment, its duration; immortality, its basis and conditions: what numberless stones there are, standing up, too, in such strange forms! What can these all mean? They mean enquiry, investigation, reverent curiosity. "SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES;" that is what they have said to thousands; thousands have obeyed, wondered still more, adored, trusted, loved, and been content presently to put for their whole case, "Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Anything is better than stagnant contentment with our own ignorance, which corrupts so fast into deadly pride, unless there are problems from which we have now and then humbly to turn away, saying, "Thy judgments are a great deep!" This is what so many of the stones mean. **II. We see God cultivating and directing the powers of memory.** 1. *The powers of memory in many instances have been not a little remarkable.* It is said that Themistocles could call by their names each one of the twenty thousand citizens of Athens. Cyrus is reported to have been able to name every soldier in his army. Ben Jonson tells us that he could repeat all that he had ever written, and whole books that he had read. Still more remarkable instances are on well-authenticated record. Memory was as much given to be trained as any other faculty. 2. *Memory, however, may be abused, and so God directs it to the highest objects.* Men are to remember His marvellous works and His gracious goodness. 3. *In teaching us to remember His works, God uses the natural rather than the ornate.* Stones from the river's bed, where the feet of the priests stood firm, would tell the story better than the most artistic and elaborate monument. So, as M. Henry suggests, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world" to keep His name and works before men to this day. **III. We see God, through well-directed remembrances, provoking praise to Himself, and care for the piety of men in the future.** The Israelites for years to come, their children, and all who saw the stones, were to learn to fear and worship God. Memory was to provoke praise, and lead to interest in the piety of others.

Verses 6, 7. "TAUGHT OF THE LORD." **I. God's method of teaching children** He stimulates enquiry. He would have the fathers set their children asking questions. This is the Divine plan in the service of the passover. The same idea pervades such passages as Deut. vi. 8, 9. This method has the advantage of beginning with the heart. When *a desire* to know is created, when curiosity is excited and interest is stirred, teaching is comparatively easy. True tact begins by laying siege to the heart; let that be taken, and forthwith the mind readily yields. Our human methods of teaching, although much improved during the last generation, are too often awkward and unnatural. Impress a child very formally and solemnly that you propose to give him some religious instruction, and you repel him by the very manner of your approach. The light and cheerful heart of a child shuts itself up before a solemn face, a didactic bearing, and under the opening sentences of a set lecture, as a sensitive plant closes before the coming of a cold wind or the beginnings of night. *Satan teaches his pupils by beginning with the heart;* he fascinates men through the medium of the senses, sets the heart aglow with wicked longings, and the biggest dullard can soon master the hardest ways of sin after that. Heaven and hell alike shew us that the way to learning is through

loving. He whose interest is deeply excited is already far advanced towards the attainment of the lesson which the careless pupil thinks it very tiresome to have to begin. **II. The subjects which God selects for the teaching of children.** 1. *God does not urge upon men the teaching of things which are secular.* This is not because secular things are unimportant. All through the Scriptures, and not least in the Pentateuch, the importance of knowing civil and social duties is fully recognised. But men do not so much need urging to teach their children the things of this life. 2. *Divine wisdom, therefore, lays stress on spiritual teaching.* It is this which is of supreme importance, it is this which parents would most readily neglect; therefore, whenever the subject of teaching children is mentioned, God says, "Teach them of Me, teach them of My works, teach them My words." **III. The ends which, through such teaching, God would secure.** 1. *He would lay deep the foundations of the national welfare.* These should rest in nothing less than the Lord Himself. So far is the Bible removed from any sympathy with the modern cry against "political dissenters" and "political Christians," that it shews us God Himself most carefully connecting the political welfare of His people with their religious training. Worldly and wicked men may think it highly desirable to have all government in their own hands; it is so much more comfortable than to be subject to the constraints of piety. Besides, it is easier for such men to *feel religious* when they control the Church, than when "society" is held in check by men of evident godliness. Some good but weak-minded Christian people think that it conduces to piety for all who love God to let politics alone, and thus leave all government, and elections to all places of authority, in the hands of the enemies of the cross of Christ. This is not the manner of God with His model nation. Divine wisdom was wont to teach that personal holiness was a necessary qualification for civil authority; the holiest men were placed highest in power, and their sins were treated as so much personal unfitness for the control of others. The children of *every household* were to be trained in the fear of the Lord; all the nation was to be pious. Had this direction been faithfully followed, and all Israel loved God, no one thinks that it would have been necessary to have spared a few wicked Canaanites for the government of the people, in order to keep the piety of the nation uncontaminated by politics. God would have all the people pious, for thus only could their highest national welfare be secured. 2. *This teaching was to aim not less at the personal welfare of each citizen.* (*a*) God would have them correct the mass by attending to the units. (*b*) God would have each person to feel himself a subject of Divine care and love. 3. *Most of all, this religious teaching was meant to secure spiritual life and eternal salvation.* Civilization would be nothing, social and national greatness nothing, without this. All the ways of God with men are meant to lead upward to Himself. He who afterwards said through Hosea, "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms," never yet taught men a single step which was not meant to lead to the throne of God and eternal life, and which was not a part of the way there.

"Parents should relate to their children, and hold before them, not their own vile deeds, but God's merciful deeds (Exod. x. 1, 2; Deut. vi. 20).

"That is the right application of God's marvellous and beneficent acts, when we learn from them truly to know, fear, and love Him (John ii. 11)." [*Starke.*]

These stones were erected into a memorial to keep the generations in remembrance that the waters were cut off "*before the Ark of the covenant of the Lord.*" How readily we forget, in our afflictions, that the covenant is our only security. Like Canute and his courtiers, we too endeavour, by methods of our own, to keep back the tides which flow towards us. Happy is he who at such a time is enough in the secret of the Lord to hear Him whisper, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

Those who have been delivered from suffering and danger, through the covenant mercy of the Lord, should not fail to erect memorials of praise, which may serve to teach and remind others of the only means by which the waters of affliction can be effectually cut off.

Verse 8. VICARIOUS SERVICE AND HONOUR.

**I. Our labour for God's people is representative labour.** We work not only for others, but in place and instead of others. One man was chosen from each tribe to bear these stones from Jordan to Gilgal, and the work is spoken of as that of "the children of Israel." 1. *There is not room for all Christians to be doing the same thing, nor are there men to spare.* If the Church were to attempt it, the industries of life would be crowded at some points, while at others they would be utterly forsaken. And the desolation of the forsaken places would soon be fatal to the overwrought industry of the crowded places, even if the crowds themselves were not fatal to the success of the few works in which everybody felt it his duty to engage. Christian men cannot all preach; there is not room, nor time, nor can more than a few be spared for the work. For the same reasons, all cannot be Sunday-school teachers or missionaries. So some are chosen out of our families and congregations to serve for all. But those who go down into the deep waters for service are there for their brethren, who elsewhere are engaged in "holding the ropes" which keep the direct workers from sinking. These twelve men from the tribes needed others, it may be, to help their wives, and little children, and aged relatives, or their sick, or some weak ones in the host for whom they should have cared, across the river. Thus the division of labour, urged so forcibly by Adam Smith, must ever be recognised, if we are to realize as we ought the proper "wealth" of Churches. Each worker in a prominent position should say, "I am here at this post for all my brethren; I represent them, and I must carry as for them, as well as for myself, as big a stone as I can, so that my tribe, my church, my school, my town, my family, may be well represented in this memorial of work for the Lord, which we are trying to build to the honour of His name, and for the help of the generations now and to come." Each worker in a lowly position may feel, on the other hand, "I am here that my brother may be yonder; and all the time I am freeing his hands to bear the actual burden of memorial, I am working in his work, which but for me and others like me he could not labour in at all. 2. *All are not fitted to do the same thing.* Life's discipline tries us and selects us, choosing one man for this part of the common service, and another for that. The tender and gentle-spirited man may not be fit for carrying large stones, but he may care for the children and encourage the weak excellently. The brawny muscular man may do well for the stones, but be poor and out of place in stimulating those who lack faith, or in sympathising with such as need patience and gentleness. Both workers are wanted, and one may be as valuable as the other.

**II. The results of work for God are representative results.** If Christian men thus labour vicariously and for one common object, it follows that the fruits of labour belong to them all. 1. *No Christian worker whose labours seem much blessed should claim pre-eminence in usefulness over his equally laborious and earnest brother.* No doubt some are more useful than others, but they are often poor judges, and especially so if they think their superior usefulness very self-evident. After all, we can seldom tell who is most successful in the process of bringing souls to the Saviour. Some conversions are claimed by many different workers, each one, instrumentally, regarding the work as his own. There are other cases in which the new-born believer acknowledges some one Christian worker as the means of leading him to the Saviour, whereas, perhaps, there have been fifty or a hundred other workers, each of whom has done as much, and it may be some of them far more than the last. If a chain in the time of storm were to hold a ship from going on the

rocks, would it be meet for the link next to the vessel, supposing it sentient and vocal, to exult over its brother links, and cry, "I saved the ship, and its two hundred passengers owe their lives to me; not a link had hold of the vessel but myself"? Why, every link all down the chain would have done as much as the links nearest to the ship. The same principle is often not less true in the salvation of men. 2. *No conscientious worker should depreciate his service, and discourage himself, because he seems to be less successful than others.* If he be working zealously and faithfully, perhaps he merely stands farther from the results. Spring does not get depressed, and say, "I was utterly unsuccessful with that wheat, and in my hands it never became much more than grass, whereas summer had no sooner come in than it burst out into ear, then into blossom, and in a few short weeks it was converted into golden grain ripe for the harvest." Spring had as much to do with that conversion as summer, though it had died out of the calendar, and become a buried season, long ere a single ear was ripe. And winter did as much in that conversion as either spring or summer. But for its cold wind and hardening atmosphere, keeping back as they did the blade, and allowing time for the downward growth beneath the soil, the whole crop might have been "root-fallen" and "lodged" and blighted, and never have come to corn at all. Winter and spring were much farther away than summer, and did a lowlier and less cheering part of the work; but surely at the time of garnering the Lord of the year shall say to these also, "Well done, good and faithful spring; well done, good and faithful winter: enter each into the joy of harvest." Not less do humbler workers contribute to the salvation of souls, and not less will they have the commendation of the Lord of this more glorious harvest.

III. **The honour in God's work should thus also be representative honour.** It should not merely be so by and by before the throne; as far as possible, it should be thus down here. They also who took care of the families of the men from the twelve tribes had part in the memorial of Gilgal. When Ciseri painted that wonderful picture of "The Entombment," which has been for some time hanging in the gallery of the Crystal Palace, the honour was not all won by the artist's hand. In point of execution, that may have been nearest to the work; but the eye saw, the mind thought, the imagination conceived, the emotional nature felt, the nerves and the whole body suffered the strain, as the hand became the vehicle to carry to the canvas those marvellous mysteries of light and shade, and that embodiment of a broken heart which looks out upon the beholder through the grief-smitten face of the Madonna. Did we regard our spiritual work as all our other labour and the processes of nature teach us to regard it, the balance of honour would be struck more evenly. Those who are known as very successful would still be glad in a just and righteous joy, though a few might be found humbler and speaking less often of their work; while, on the other hand, many a godly mother who thought she had failed with her children, many a teacher who prayed and strove and saddened under a similar sorrow, many a humble preacher and lowly servant of Jesus would be encouraged, as they were helped to feel that their words had not fallen to the ground, and that their arduous and well-meant labour was "not in vain in the Lord."

Verse 9. THE MEMORIAL IN JORDAN.

I. **The value of corroborative testimony.** In the years to come, when the generation who had seen the miracle had died out, the memorial in the river would help to impress beholders with the absolute truth of the tradition. Jordan would go to confirm Gilgal, and the stones at Gilgal would serve to substantiate the record of those in Jordan. So in the history of our Lord's ministry, Matthew, and Mark, and Luke, and John, each serve to confirm the other. A single epistle of Paul might be questioned, but the coincident testimony of them all has placed them each above the reach of the most malignant criticism. II. **The beauty of offerings**

which come from the promptings of the heart. This memorial in Jordan does not appear to have been commanded. It may have been that Joshua was told to erect this also, but there is no record of the command. This memorial seems to have been the outcome of the heart's gladness. Such "praise is comely" to God. Christ's reception of the irregular and, to some, unseemly offering of the woman's box of ointment. **III. The permanence of interest which belongs to our holier service for God.** "They are there *unto this day*." Bush says, "These are either the words of Joshua, who wrote his history near the close of his life, and about twenty years after the event occurred, or they were added at a subsequent period by Samuel or Ezra, or some other inspired man or men by whom the sacred canon was revised." 1. *Our holier times of thankfulness to God and communion with Him can never be forgotten by ourselves.* If Joshua wrote this verse twenty years after the miracle, it shews how deep was the spiritual joy in which he had thanked God for dividing the waters. Every godly man should have times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord which he can never forget. 2. *Our holier times of thankfulness to God and communion with Him will lead us so to use and record them that they will long prove of interest to others.* If Samuel added these words, it must have been three hundred years later; if they were added by Ezra, it must have been after the lapse of nine centuries. Probably they were written by Joshua, for the phrase, "unto this day," occurs no less than twelve times in this book. Be this as it may, it is the work of our deeper spiritual experiences which furnishes memorials of interest to others. When, being dead, a Christian man yet speaketh to those who follow him, it is ever from the intenser experiences of his spiritual life. It is such experiences that preserve the names of the men themselves: Luther, Knox, Brainerd, McCheyne. It is only in the outcome of his richest life that any Christian survives himself.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 10—19.

THE REWARDS OF SERVICE AND THE PENALTIES OF SIN.

**I. He who begins with God will need God to the end.** Ver. 10, 11. It was not "until everything was finished," and "all the people were clean passed over," that the Ark left the river. Having begun to cross under the help of God, His presence was needed till the last man was in Canaan. It is ever thus with God's people now. There is no single step which they can afford to take without Him. The moment He left them, the pent-up floods would sweep them away. He who is thus needed by His people graciously abides with them. They who follow Christ may presently say, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." **II. He who is faithful before God will be rewarded with God's approval.** Ver. 12, 13. Our promises to each other are not hidden from the Lord. When they are kept, He makes record of our faithfulness. Not less does He behold us if they are broken. **III. He who honours God will be honoured by God.** Joshua had honoured God by his obedience to the Divine commands, and not less by the spirit which he had manifested throughout. Joshua, in turn, was magnified (1) in his exalted communion with God, (2) in his abiding influence over the people, and (3) in his inheritance of the dignity and power, as well as the place, of Moses, his great predecessor. **IV. He who waits in obedience to God will not be forgotten of God.** Ver. 15—17. The priests must have stood in this position of seeming danger, bearing the Ark for several hours. When we where wait God bids us or places us:—1. We wait in perfect safety. 2. We never wait in vain. Such

waiting is useful (*a*) to ourselves, (*b*) and useful to others. 3. **We shall not have** to wait a moment after our work is done. None need think, in his trial, that God has forgotten him. **V. He who trusts God will assuredly find cause to bless God.** Ver. 18. The people had been walking by faith; the priests had waited in faith. Reason, and intelligence, and thought on the laws of nature, could make nothing of these upstanding waters. It was only as they remembered God that the priests dared to stand in the river, or that the people dared to cross. Each ventured because of the presence of God, symbolised as it was in the Ark. They feared as they crossed, and they "hasted and passed over." How their fears must have been rebuked and their faith confirmed by the closing scene of the miracle! No sooner did the Ark leave Jordan, than the waters burst forth, and rushed on their way. The people must have felt more than ever, "This thing was *all of God*." 1. *Using our faith, we shall soon have reason to bless God for the increase of faith.* The end of His ways confirms our ventures into confidence. 2. *Using our faith, we shall presently come, almost before we are aware of it, into the full fruition of all our hope.* They who ventured and went on in haste, and trusted as best they could, presently found themselves in the promised land. It had been long looked for, long desired; then, through some fear, and some confusion, and the best trust they could command, they suddenly find themselves in Canaan. What a picture it is of many a life and many an ending of life! Still we have to say, "So He bringeth them unto their desired haven." **VI. He who rebels against God will find that God's penalties are as severe as His threatenings.** Ver. 19. The forty years were fully accomplished, saving just this margin of five days with which God seems to lay emphasis on the merciful side of His faithfulness. The carcases that were doomed had every one fallen in the wilderness. The spared lives of Joshua and Caleb seem to lay even a severer stress on the faithfulness of Divine threats and the terrible realness of Divine wrath. It is by such incidents as these that we can best contemplate such solemn questions as that of eternal punishment. Those who have almost come to believe that no one will be utterly destroyed, would do well to remember that God has ever been as severe as His word. *The history of His judgments is quite as awful as the prophecies which foretold them.* Was not the banishment from Eden as awful as the threat? Was the destruction of Sodom less terrible than the terms in which it was revealed to Abraham? Were not the successive struggles which preceded the captivity at Babylon, and was not the captivity itself, fully as dreadful as the warning words of the prophet? True, the Saviour stood and wept over Jerusalem, and said fearful words about wrath coming through the Romans: surely no one can read the heart-rending story of Josephus, and not feel that, stern as was the prophecy, the history is even more awful. God's threats have never been mere threats. The fulfilment has ever been as terrible as the prediction. None of the Divine threats recorded in the Bible in any measure approximate to the awful words which set forth the final destruction of the wicked. Read these numerous passages how we will, the world has never heard anything like them before. With such a series of threatenings, and with such a history of previous fulfilments of lesser threatenings to expound them, it seems almost idle to speculate as some are speculating on theories of punishment. *Of what account are any differences which we can measure and estimate, where all is so incomprehensibly dreadful?* As to the merciful character of God, the mercy which would fail so to punish would also have forborne thus to threaten. Some modern views of Divine mercy proceed on the assumption that it is necessary to the perfectness of the Divine character. It seems to be forgotten that where mercy becomes essential it ceases to be mercy, and at that point is a right. Let us look somewhat more steadfastly at the threatenings which have been fulfilled, and remember that "God in history" will better serve for guidance than man in theory.

## OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 10, 11.—THE WAY OF DIFFICULTY.

I. **Remembrance of God is the only encouragement through which some parts of life's way become bearable and passable.** What the symbol of God's presence was to Israel, such is our perception of Him by faith to us. We may have to endure "as seeing Him who is invisible," but there are not a few places in which this is the only way to endure with hopefulness. Stoicism may be matured till a man, in any trial, can keep just calm enough not to cry out; at such times it is only in the thought of God that we can walk on in the calmness of hope. Happy is he who is not driven to say, "I remembered God, and was troubled." II. **God's regard to the greater trials of our life does not call off His attention from details.** He not only parted the waters, but He waited in the river, both in power and presence, "until *everything* was finished." III. **The general commandments of the Bible are meant to regulate and control the specific acts of our life.** "According to all that Moses," etc. But Moses had never given any commands touching the actual passage of the Jordan. Yet Moses had commanded an implicit reliance on Divine guidance and a careful obedience to Divine requirements. Such general words covered all the particulars of the case. There are many things in the family, in business, in the Church, and in the world, which no specific precept may touch; there is absolutely no place which we can occupy in our daily life which in principle and in spirit is not covered by the Scriptures. IV. **While Divine patience never wearies in giving us necessary help, when God goes before, we should promptly follow.** "The people hasted and passed over." Whatever motive actuated their haste, haste was the right thing for the time. God does not work that we may idly look on. His manifest energy is a call for our marked diligence. Cf. 2 Sam. v. 24. V. **God, who makes way in the van of our difficulties, is no less necessary to secure our rear.** Ver. 11. Cf. Deut. xxv. 17, 18. Not only that He may see His people, but that He may save them, He besets them "behind and before." They may say one to another, "The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward."

Ver. 10, last clause. Several reasons have been given by different writers for this haste, each writer usually contending for his own. Probably the majority of the people were moved by fear, but some feelings may have led some of the host to hasten, and other considerations others. I. *The haste of fear.* This also leads to Canaan. II. *The haste of diligence.* With so many to cross, and so much to be done, each had need to remember, "the night cometh." III. *The haste of reverent obedience.* God does not work mightily and command urgently that men may move slothfully. IV. *The haste of compassion.* While the people tarried, the priests must wait. No man ever idles without expense and inconvenience to some one else. V. *The haste of unconscious influence.* The quick movement of a few would communicate itself to all. Our pace times that of our companion, and his that of others. How glorious are life's privileges; how solemn its responsibilities!

Verses 12, 13.—I. They who promise freely should perform faithfully (Numb. xxxii. 17-20). No promise can be broken without injury to him who has pledged his word, however it may be concerning those to whom the promise is made. It is said that the Earl of Chatham promised his son that he should be present at the pulling down of a garden wall. Through forgetfulness, the wall was destroyed in the son's absence. Feeling, however, the importance of his word, the father had it rebuilt, in order that, according to his promise, his son might witness its demolition. II. They who have already come into the joy of inheritance should be foremost in seeking the same blessing for others. III. They who are best fitted to go to the front should not

shrink from it on account of danger. These were chosen men. They had no families with them to hinder their movements. IV. They who take the place of danger in the cause of their brethren must win honour, whether victory is theirs or not.

Verse 14. I. The Lord's idea of the qualifications necessary in a leader of His people. 1. Natural capacity. 2. Absolute obedience. 3. Lofty courage. 4. Deep humility. 5. Absence of self-seeking. 6. Generous concern for others. II. The Lord's idea of the influence necessary to a leader of His people. 1. The gratitude of the people through remembrances of past help. 2. The fear of the people for one with whom the Lord evidently dwells. 3. The confidence of the people in one through whom the Lord manifestly works.

The best way to the highest honour is through obedience to our exalted Lord.

God does but magnify men that they may better help their fellows, and thus glorify Him in return.

He only will be magnified by God, who longs to bring men into the promised possession.

"Whom God will make great, him He first makes small through wearisome cross, and care, and toil, and danger." [*Cramer.*]

Whom God greatly magnifies, men should regard with reverence and fear. Cf. 2 Kings ii. 23—25.

Verses 15—17. WAITING ON THE LORD.

The priests stood still till they were commanded to leave the river. The waters were heaped above them, the people had all passed over, but even then they waited for the word of the Lord. I. The character and spirit of our waiting. 1. *Waiting on the Lord does not mean the suspension of our own efforts.* The priests were still to bear the Ark. Not for a single moment were they to put it down. Our toil may have to go on to very weariness. 2. *Waiting on the Lord does mean that no trust is to be placed in our own efforts, but that all our faith is to be in the love and energy of God.* Our efforts have often about as much power to work out the results we seek as the holding of this wooden chest in the middle of the river had to keep back the waters. II. The necessity for our waiting. 1. *There is often a necessity in the nature of the case itself.* The time taken for so large a host to cross the river could not be other than long. God was willing to work miraculously to make a way for the people, but not to help them over. Our difficulties always present not only a place for Divine help, but a sphere for human effort, and our part generally takes up much time. 2. *There is a necessity in the direction of our own discipline.* We cannot learn trust and patience as theories, any more than a soldier can learn drill and battle from books. He must go through his task; we must do the same with ours. Carlyle has said, "Experience is an excellent schoolmaster, but he does charge such dreadful wages." Beecher has somewhere written, "God sends experience to paint men's portraits. Does some longing youth look at the settled face of a Washington, whose lineaments have been transmitted to us by the artist's skill, and strive to wear as noble a mien? That look—the winds of the Alleghanies, the trials of the Jersey winter, the sufferings at Cambridge, the conflicts with Congress, wrought it out; and he who would gain it must pass through as stern a school." Much more must the children of God, who would be "transformed into the image of His Son," get one by one those Divine lineaments graven into their spirits by *doing and bearing* the will of God.

"He cannot be a perfect man,
Not being try'd and tutor'd in the world."

3. *The will of God to His children should ever be necessity enough.* If we can see no other reason for having to wait, this may well be sufficient. Christ placed the dreadful agony of Gethsemane just on this ground—"Not as I

will, but as Thou wilt." III. Encouragements in our waiting. 1. *Many of our difficulties are mainly in the heart, and the very act of trusting in God brings the relief we seek.* There are times, as was the case here in Jordan, when difficulties are outward and actual; even then, to wait on God is best. There are other times when our trials come from our own fears and weakness; then "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength" in the very process of trusting Him. 2. *At the point where our earthly comforts fail us, heavenly delights begin most to abound.* God would not prepare all His mercies for our flesh. This time of weary waiting and physical discomfort to the priests was a time in which with reverent communion and holy joy their spirits might be strengthened in God. Such hours with God make spiritual stamina for a lifetime. 3. *Exceeding great and precious promises assure us that "Blessed are all they that wait for Him."* Our waiting is ever in the light of His word, let there be what other darkness there may. 4. "*Did ever any trust in God and was confounded?*" Our waiting is illuminated with promises before us, and with history behind. "He that believeth shall not make haste."

"If often the faithful God before our eyes graciously helps others out of need and peril, while we, in our own thought, are left far behind, still our hour also shall yet come. Let us only await the right time." [*Cramer.*]

Verse 18. "So long as Christ, the true mercy-seat, is under us, and His ministers in this unquiet life preach the gospel, we need not fear; the great floods of sin and of the wrath of God must retire, because for them that are in Christ Jesus there is now no condemnation."

"The enemies of the Church can proceed no farther than has been appointed to them."

"If Christ and His word depart from us, then must we be eternally overwhelmed and perish." [*Cramer.*]

1. In the beginning of a believer's triumph he sees readily that the power and the work are alone of God. 2. Familiarity with the wonderful works of God sometimes finds His people regarding them as natural, and taking them as matter-of-course occurrences. 3. Therefore the end of God's ways, even more manifestly than the beginning, declares the power to have been all from on high.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 20—24.

### Religious Teaching.

I. Its inspiring topics. 1. *The glory of God in His works.* Not merely in His works in Nature; in such also as are contrary to Nature. 2. *The love and mercy of God in His works* for His people. The Lord "doth put a difference" between these and others. God loves all men. Under the Gospel, He invites all men into His family. It is simply cruel and sinful to teach that the Lord works for and defends everybody alike. If the Bible be true at all, God's merciful works are as distinctively given to the Church now as of old. He has always caused His rain to descend, and made His sun to shine, on the fields of the just and the unjust; for by His goodness and in His all-reaching love He would lead the unjust to repentance; nevertheless, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." Every page of the Bible reveals this. These old typical nations were specially meant to set forth the truth that distinctive mercies here, and salvation hereafter, were the heritage of only such as feared the Lord. 3. *The efficiency of God's works to make a way for His people through any and all obstacles.* The sea and the flooded river are two of the strongest symbols of force which the world presents. In His hands, neither can hinder for an hour the free movement of His people. 4. *The comfort*

*which the Lord can give, and loves to give, to those who walk in His paths.* No matter where the paths lie, He loves to shew His people that through sea or through river He can make the way as "dry land." Such are some of the themes which this one work and its memorials were to set to music. **II. Its unlimited aims.** Religious teaching is to aim at the benefit: 1. *Of our own children.* Home should be our first care. Some earnest people in the present day seem to think that religious life and zeal must be very poor unless they spend four or five evenings in the week at religious meetings. Some can hardly avoid this, and to these it may be a duty which they dare not neglect; may those who can avoid it never have to say, "They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard have I not kept." 2. *Of neglected children.* The Jews were all supposed to teach their own children. Religious instruction among them was to be parental. The heads of each family were supposed to fear God, and, fearing Him themselves, were to teach their households to fear Him also. Still, some parents would be careless, and, from various causes, some children would be neglected. These were to be carefully instructed by others. At the feast of tabernacles in the year of release, special attention was to be given to any who were ignorant of God (Deut. xxxi. 10—13). So carefully did the Lord provide against the leaven of ignorance that might in time leaven the whole lump of the nation. 3. *Of neglected men and women.* Opportunity was to be taken to let "all the people" of the land know of God (ver. 24). 4. *Of the generations to come.* It was said of Achilles, that he was vulnerable only in the heel. However fictitious that may be as to the ancient Greek, there is only one place in which the sin and ignorance of the future can be attacked; it is as some one has said, "The children of this generation are the only point at which the generation to come is vulnerable." If it be asked, as some have asked, "Why all this care about the coming generations? What do we owe to future society?" it would be enough to reply as the late John Stuart Mill replied to the same question, put in our British parliament,—"What have we received from society?" Let us count but a little of that, and even from this human point of view our duty will be clear. But every Christian must also ask, "What have I received from God? What does God demand of me in return?" Our fathers have been the channel through which a thousand mercies have come to us, and the generations to come are calling upon us by our most sacred obligations to the generations that are past. **III. Its lofty and holy purposes.** 1. To help men to know God. 2. To help men to fear God. 3. To help men to live as in the presence of God for ever. F. W. Faber beautifully said, "The more we know of God, the more our complacency increases; because, to fill our minds and engross us, the simple thought of God must be multiplied and repeated from a thousand objects. It is like the sun lighting up a mountain chain. He is not multiplied in himself, but as his golden magnificence lights up peak after peak, we become more and more surrounded by His effulgence. It is thus with God: each attribute to which we give a name, though His attributes in truth are His simple self, is to us a separate height crowned and glowing with His glory, and so reflecting Him upon our souls; while the multitude of nameless perfections, for which we have neither ideas, words, nor standards, are to us like the consciousness of the glorious sea of mountain tops which are beyond our ken, but which we know to be resting in that furnace of golden light, and adding to the burning splendour which is circumfused over earth and sea and sky." So, too, as we learn to see God in His many works which are about us, especially in those works which make part of our personal experience and life, His name will be repeated to us as from a thousand points instead of one or two. Our grateful remembrances of His mercies will make them so many upstanding points, rising far above the low and poor levels of a natural life, and catching and retaining for our vision something of the brightness of His majesty and the glory of His love, which will thus be suffused over us from all our personal history, and hardly less from the history of the whole Church of Christ.

## OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 20—22. Sunday School Instruction.

The principles involved in the work of our Sunday-schools are repeatedly enforced even in the O. T. I. The duty of this work. To whom does the duty belong? Given that time and opportunity are at command, surely it belongs to all who love Christ. Our Lord, on receiving the assurance of Peter's love, said, "Feed my lambs." Many feel that they are not worthy to engage in labour like this. The thought of personal sin keeps many back, albeit they claim to be Christians, and could not bear to think themselves without love to the Saviour. Is not that scene at the sea of Tiberias specially meant to assure such? We are usually told that our Lord there rebuked Peter three times, because Peter had thrice denied Him. The reason of our Lord's threefold utterance lay far deeper than that. Possibly rebuke was intended, but mercy and the forethought of Divine love were far more prominent. Would not the day be likely to come in Peter's future when he should say, "Can I who have denied Christ dare to teach Him to others?" Peter might come to feel that he who had thrice disowned his Lord was utterly unworthy to engaged in work like this. So three times, once for every denial, does the Saviour tenderly recommission him to the work of feeding both the sheep and the lambs. It seems as if our Lord had not only thus anticipated what might be the future feeling of His apostle, but the feeling of many of His disciples now. To love Him is to become responsible for doing all that we have opportunity to perform. II. The necessity of adaptation in this work. God adapts Himself to the minds of children, now in the imposing rites of the Passover, and now in this cairn of stones at Gilgal. What is here indicated in the way of a general principle, a wise teacher will endeavour to carry out in detail; he will try and meet each child where he finds him; he will study even individual dispositions. One child will be loving and warm-hearted; excite his love, meet him where he is accessible, tell him something which has pathos. Another boy will be strong in integrity, and honesty, and truthfulness; tell him of Joseph and Daniel, and the three Hebrews. A third will be quiet and gentle; speak low to him. One will hate hard; give him fit subjects for his idiosyncrasy, tell him of Herod and Judas, and presently he will hear you on higher themes. Another will be the stupid boy of the class; on him, most of all, lavish kindness, attention, and gentleness. Our aim in Christian work is to win others to love the Saviour; and God, who comes to men where they are, and brings pictures into the nursery of the infant world, teaches us adaptation. III. The nobility of this work. Addressing, a few years since, a convention of Sunday-school teachers, the Right Hon. John Bright said, "I may be in a more conspicuous, but I am certainly not in a more noble field than that in which you are engaged." Peradventure the statesman was right, for there are few labours more exalted than this. We look at Rembrandt's picture of Christ stilling the tempest, and as we see the storm-tossed waves dashing over the prow of the boat, and behold the agitated faces of the disciples, we love to think of the majesty of Him who with His mere word hushed both sea and men into calm and peace. But Overbeck's subject of Christ with the little children is even more sublime. In the one case you see power controlling power; in the other you have the loftier spectacle of power blessing weakness. It is this which makes the ministry of the Saviour so glorious; all through it, His perfect power and spotless holiness are seen healing and helping sinful men in their weakness and necessity. Whatever of greatness was manifested in the work of Knibb and Clarkson, Sturge and Wilberforce, in nothing were they so great as in using their power to take off the fetters from the last of England's slaves. Howard and Cobden won all their

fame in helping the weak and the oppressed. It is this which makes the work of Sunday-schools so truly noble. In that work, Christian men and women give their time and strength, not only for children, but for neglected children. Many of these, in their weakness and guilelessness, would be taken captive by the wicked on every hand, and dragged low as perdition; this work hopefully proposes to make them "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ."

Verse 23. New mercies should lead us to call to mind mercies that are past. If we compare those which our fathers had with those which God gives to us, great as theirs undoubtedly were, ours will often be found to be even greater.

The mercies which came to our fathers should also be counted among our own; they too made way for the heritage on which we daily enter.

God's mercies to us should be so turned to account, that they may become an inheritance to our children.

Meditation on the ways of God in past mercies will serve to assure us that the mercies which we now have will be continued so long as we need them: sea or river, it matters not which, each is divided till the Lord's people have "passed over."

Verse 24. MIGHTY WORKS AND THEIR MIGHTY PURPOSES.

I. **The mighty works of God are never meant to be self-contained.** They invariably reach out to things beyond the actual work, and beyond those to whom it seems confined. No Divine miracle is ever complete in itself. Though it may sound paradoxical, the miracle ever appears to be the smallest part of the work which the work contemplates. For once, the less is made to contain the greater. Divine works are seed-forms which are sown from the hand of Omnipotence; they are meant to swell and germinate and grow, and to bring forth fruit through the years and centuries which follow. Who knows but that during the ages which have since fled, more souls have not been brought by this miracle into the heavenly Canaan, than even the number who, through it, entered the goodly land on earth? Our works, like those of our heavenly Father, should ever contemplate results beyond those which are immediate and present. He works well, and after the pattern of God, who works (1) for others, (2) for time to come, and (3) for eternity.

II. **The mighty works of God are meant to teach us the knowledge of God.** 1. *All work is declarative of the worker.* Some persons profess to read a character in the handwriting of a letter; they might read more perfectly if, to the manner in which it were set down, they added a study of the letter itself. What a man does is a photograph of what a man is; it is the outward expression of his inward self. Perhaps we need our works to know ourselves; certainly others need them in order that they may know us. Our features and bearing reveal much of our disposition to others; but our works, most of all, seem to be the glass through which men look into our consciousness and life. If works are needed to declare to us men whom we have seen much more must we study Divine works if we would know God, whom we have never seen. 2. *Even aimless work proclaims the character of its author.* So far as such work goes to make up the life, it shews a worker who is willing that power should be thrown away. Aimless work tells of no to-morrow in a man's mind, of no consciousness of the woes and wants of men around, of no longings and yearnings to help them. Aimless work tells of nothing but the corresponding blank in the worker's heart, out of which it was born. It is the outward and empty "amen" to the inward and empty life. 3. *The design of work reveals the character of the worker.* Is the work selfish or generous; for the hour only, or for time to come? What a magnificent study, taken in this light, is presented by the works of God! 4. *The execution of a work no less proclaims the worker.* It tells us of the measure of his power, and writes down the character of his patience; it tells us whether there is a love of effect and display, or whether the energy which

performs is animated mainly by the generosity that desires to help. The best works of the best of men shew failure in purpose, failure in capability failure in patience; it is only before the results of Divine wisdom and energy and love that we can dare to say, "ALL Thy works praise Thee, O God!" If God's works do not teach us of Himself, though they may bring us temporary relief, the chief purpose of them is lost. **III. The mighty works of God are for all men, and whether men will or not, they will be for all men for ever.** 1. They are designed to teach **His people.** 2. **They are wrought and perpetuated before the heathen and the stranger, so that whosoever will may see, and fear, and turn to the Lord.** 3. They will be for ever a cause of self-reproach to the lost. 4. They will be eternally a theme of praise for the redeemed. As though in allusion to the rejoicing at the Red Sea, we are told of the host above who have gotten the victory—"They sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints."

## CHAPTER V.

### *PREPARATION FOR THE LORD'S WAR.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **Amorites**] Deriv. from *Amar* = "high," "lofty." The people were "dwellers in the mountains" (cf. Numb. xiii. 29, and chap. xi. 3). *Kurtz* and *Fürst* think that the word has an allusion to the large stature of the race: "lofty, high-towering, gigantic" men. Sometimes, and apparently in this verse, the term Amorites is applied to the inhabitants of the land generally. In chap. x. 5, the king of Jerusalem, who ruled over Jebusites, is mentioned as one of five kings of the Amorites. **Spirit**] Lit. "breath." The stopping or taking away of the breath is indicative of the extreme astonishment and fear by which they were overwhelmed. 2. **Sharp knives**] Marg. "knives of flints" (cf. Exod. iv. 25). The reason for using stone knives may have been more on account of legal than of physical considerations. The use of iron was certainly forbidden in some covenant rites (cf. Exod. xx. 25; Deut. xxvii. 5; chap. viii. 31). ["Among the additions of the LXX. at the end of this book is the curious statement after chap. xxiv. 30: 'There they placed with him, in the tomb where they buried him, the knives of stone (τὰς μαχαίρας τας πετρίνας) with which he circumcised the sons of Israel in Gilgal.'"—*Dr. Bliss.*] **The second time**] Perhaps the phrase, as is intimated in the verses which follow, has regard to the circumcising, at *two different periods, or times*, of the entire host of men now assembled in Canaan. Mentally, the host is divided into two parts, which are circumcised some at one time, some at another; the time of the earlier circumcision was in Egypt, and "the second time" of circumcision was this at Gilgal. The reference made by Masius to two *general circumcisions*, one at the time of the introduction of the rite by Abraham, and the other here, an idea often noticed since, appears too remote, and is rather opposed than otherwise to the fourth and fifth verses. A similar use of this phrase occurs in Isa. xi. 11. 4. **This is the cause**] The cause of this general circumcision is stated at length, the explanation reaching to the close of ver. 7. The reason why the rite had been omitted during the sojourn in the wilderness is given in ver. 6. The people had broken the covenant, and "the Lord sware that He would not shew them the land." The oath of the wilderness cancelled for the time the oath to Abraham, and Jehovah would not allow the people to set the oath that was suspended over against the oath which was in force. 9. **The reproach of Egypt**] Not necessarily any one phase of the reproach arising out of their past relation to Egypt, but the reproach in all its forms. **Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal**] Marg. = "rolling." "It denotes *liberty*: they looked on themselves as freed from the miseries which they had undergone" (*Josephus, Ant.* v. 1. 11). "All objections (of the rationalists) indicate an utter inattention to the fact that most of the O. T. etymologies contain allusions to words and their meaning, rather than such full explanations of them as befit a lexicon" (*Keil*). 10. **Kept the passover**] This was the third passover feast; the first was kept in Egypt, the second at Sinai (Num. ix. 5). The feast of the covenant could not be observed while the covenant itself was broken. 13. **By Jericho**] Lit., *in* Jericho. Ewald gives the meaning, "the immediate neighbourhood, the closest connection with another thing, and, as it were, the act of entering into it." This should have prevented the remark, "The place may have been near Gilgal . . . . 'Near Gilgal' would be equivalent to 'by Jericho.'" Joshua had evidently gone to investigate the city, and was near to it when the vision occurred. 14. **And did worship**] "The words are not only used

in connection with the worship of God, but also to denote the deep reverence which is shewn in the East by a subject to his king; *e.g.*, 2 Sam. ix. 6, xiv. 33" (*Keil*). Taken by themselves, therefore, the words do not prove that this was the Divine Being; taken with other expressions, they are nevertheless contributive to this conclusion. Whatever reverence kings may accept, angels seem jealously to regard such homage as the sole prerogative of God (cf. Rev. xix. 10, xxii. 9).

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verse* 1.

### The Fear of the Ungodly.

**In the facts of which this verse assures us, and in the history to which it refers us:—I. We have conviction coming through the manifest working of God.** 1. *The occasion of man's idolatry and sin is ever found in low and poor thoughts of God.* Let God be distant and remote from a man's consciousness, let Him be thought of infrequently and feebly, and the result will soon be seen in a following after "other gods." Joshua's predecessor, through whom God was so manifestly present before the Israelites, had not left the people six weeks ere they said unto Aaron, "Up, make us gods which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him." The history of these Canaanites must have contained a similar experience. Sons of Noah though they were, and intense as must have been the religious remembrances of their fathers, Ham and Canaan, the power and goodness and justice and the very being of God had become a mere tradition. On the basis of the Usherian chronology, barely nine hundred years had elapsed since the awful deluge. In the antediluvian age this was only about the period of a lifetime, and if in the subsequent generation the sons of Ham lived as long as the sons of Shem—a term of some four hundred and thirty years—Canaan himself would possibly have been living, to teach the fear of the Lord among his descendants, for nearly half the period between the days of the flood and the crossing of the Jordan. Nor had the Canaanites been left without at least one solemn intervening remonstrance. Just about midway between the time of the flood and the entrance of the Israelites into their land, and possibly not fifty years after the death of Canaan, another and an awful judgment had told these people of an all-seeing and omnipotent God, who was determined to punish sin. It was on the families of the Canaanites that God poured out the terrible fire of Sodom and Gomorrah (comp. Gen. x. 19 with Gen. xix.) God ought not to have been so absent from the thoughts of these men; but they had long suffered His very name to become merely a story of the past, and on neither name nor story did they trouble themselves much to think. Hence they went after idols, the idols being, as idols always are, the embodiment of the wicked and corrupt desires which ever follow forgetfulness of God. With no consciousness of God's presence, they had long been led to unrestrained idolatry and unchecked wickedness. He who, in these days, loses the sense of God's presence and power and goodness and purity, loses all that can keep him from idolatry and its consequent degradations. The very name Emmanuel—God with us—tells where our danger most lies, and wherein the blessedness of following Christ so much consists. 2. *The manifest interposition of God, in great works for His people, brings conviction to the most hardened and abandoned of men.* So long as men only hear of God, they can disbelieve Him, and more or less undisturbedly pursue their own way; but when God works in a manner for which no human hand or name is a sufficient explanation, immediately the unbelieving are arrested. The great cause of all that is different between the disciples of Christ and the unbelieving in the present day is given in the Saviour's own words—"Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more, but ye see Me." The one effort of such modern scientists as are virtually atheists seems to be to account for such works as are too great for man by some other name than that of God. If

"protoplasm" could only account for life; if "development" would but be sufficiently agreeable to stand as an equivalent for its various forms; if the movements of life would only allow themselves to be called "automatic;" and if human consciousness, which will keep looking upward, and lisping that great word GOD, could only be taught to pronounce the obscure and ugly compound "anthropomorphism," then, surely, the world, and even its more wicked sons and daughters, might have peace. True, some of us might still want a long word to explain fulfilled prophecies, and shew us how Nature taught some of her more reverent children to "shew us things to come," and to shew them in marvellous fulness of detail seven or eight centuries—not to say more—before they came to pass. The more anthropomorphic of us might require a good many Greek vocables, and tax rather tiresomely the patience and scholarship of the learned sons of science to put them pleasantly together, ere we could keep that great word GOD from speaking within and echoing through our consciousness, when we read *together, as making one chapter*, the well-authenticated *works* and CLAIMS and CHARACTER of Jesus Christ. There might be a few other things which, in the event of insufficient explanation, we should require to read of in awkward and unnatural phrases ere we could persuade ourselves that they were the outcome merely of Nature. Meanwhile, like the Amorites and Israelites before the divided Jordan, we behold many wonderful works around us in life and behind us in history, for which we can only find one equivalent cause, and that cause GOD. 3. *History shews us that when standing immediately before the greater and more manifest works of God, men have ever felt that from them there was no appeal.* At the Red Sea the long enslaved Israelites sang, "The Lord is my strength and song." Their history but too sadly proves their readiness to forget Jehovah; they could not but own Him there, and on many similar occasions afterwards. The assembled people on Carmel waited all day in the spirit of judgment; we feel their indecision and unformed conclusions in their very silence. The whole attitude of the host was one of expectancy and waiting. The very act of pronouncing their verdict tells us that they were at least not biassed before it was given. It was only after the laboured failure of the Baalites, the scorn and confidence of Elijah, and after seeing the fire of heaven lick up the water and attack the sacrifice, that they cried with one accord, "Jehovah, He is the God." However much he might have doubted before or after, amid the solemn darkness, the rending earthquake, and the awful words of Calvary, the centurion could only feel and say, "Truly this was the Son of God." The arrogant Sanhedrin, who thought they had disposed for ever of the Master, and could do as they would in contemning the work of the disciples, "when they saw the lame man healed, could say nothing against it." It is easy enough to try and dismiss numberless cases like these by saying that such conclusions of men are not spoken in calmness, but under the influence of excitement and awe. That is the very difficulty. How is it that ever, when the heart stands in awe before unusual power, it remembers God, and is troubled? We can understand the relapse into the normal unbelief when the sounds of the call to faith have died away in the distance. How is it that whenever the supernatural is present, men invariably stand convinced of the unseen God? It is no answer to this question to talk of superstition; when all the talk about superstition is ended, it still remains to be asked, "Why should superstition ever lead men into the presence of God, and never choose to leave them elated or abashed before the majesty of Nature? There can be only one answer: The soul is responding to the voice of its Maker, and that Maker is God. **II. We see conviction invariably working fear.** Insensibly and instantaneously, as these Canaanites behold the river divided, and remember the overthrow of Sihon and Og, and the miracle at the Red Sea, they are filled with fear of the Lord God of Israel. It is ever thus with those who have forgotten Jehovah, and turned to devices of their own. 1. *The fear which comes from ignorance.* Not "seeing Him who is invisible,"

men cannot endure the works which declare His presence. 2. *Fear as intensified by sin.* Sinful Adam heard the voice of God, and, for the first time, so far as we know, he was afraid. When guilty Herod heard of the fame of Jesus, he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead." Conscience, as Trench has pointed out, is, in its very structure, a solemn word. "It is from 'con' and scire.' But what does that 'con' intend? Conscience is not merely that which I know, but that which I know *with some one else.* . . . . That other knower whom the word implies is God." So, when we transgress, we have only to be brought by some of His works into the consciousness of the Lord's presence, and sin intensifies fear at once. We feel that the guilt which we know, He knows also. And from this law none escape:

> "What art thou, thou tremendous Power,
> Who dost inhabit us without our leave;
> And art within ourselves another self,
> A master-self, that loves to domineer,
> And treat the monarch frankly as the slave?"—*Young.*

3. *Fear as a Divine provision and ordinance.* God had determined and appointed this very melting of heart which the Amorites now suffered. Forty years previously God had said to Moses, about this very trepidation, "I will send my fear before thee." The fear of the wicked is no less God's ordinance now than it was of old. **III. The fear thus wrought by God is seen becoming helpful to speedy salvation, or accessory to sudden destruction.** Rahab feared, and believed, and sought deliverance, and was saved; the Canaanites feared, and resisted, and were destroyed. Montaigne said, "Fear sometimes adds wings to the heels, and sometimes nails them to the ground, and fetters them from moving." Happy is he in whom the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Where this is not so, fear is often immediately preliminary to overthrow. It is the awful gloom of coming destruction which is seen overshadowing those whom it hardly waits longer to involve, and the very fear of the coming calamity hastens the end which it so solemnly predicts.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verse 1.**—Religious Conviction.

**I. The essence of true religious conviction is conviction of the presence of God.** For want of that, these men had turned idolaters. Had they always felt the God of Israel as near as they felt Him now, the worship of their idols would have been an impossibility. When we get and continue to know and feel that God is round about us, all else in religious life will follow. 1. *Assured of God's presence, we shall immediately feel the reality and guilt of sin.* Job said, "Now mine eye seeth Thee, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Isaiah in his vision saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Peter, beholding the Deity of Christ through His mighty working, started back abashed, saying, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." So it has ever been: to see God present is to feel that sin is very real and very offensive. 2. *Assured of God's presence, we have no peace till we feel that sin is put away by forgiveness.* With deep and true insight Milton tells us how the prince of darkness was troubled in the presence of holiness—

> "Abashed the devil stood,
> And felt how awful goodness is."

So must unforgiven men ever feel troubled by the presence of God. When Peter first saw the Deity of the Saviour, he had no peace in that holy and to him awful presence; after he had been a long time with Jesus, and had learned of Him, and when he was in the rapture of a diviner mood, he cried as he beheld the glory of the transfigured Son of God,

"Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles." It is only when we have learned the love and forgiveness of the Saviour, and come ourselves somewhat into the mind of Christ, that we are able to endure His presence. Then that presence is no longer our keenest pain, but becomes our deepest peace. 3. *A growing sense of God's presence is the essential accompaniment of a religious life.* When Nathanael came to Christ, he came sceptically, nor did he care to conceal his doubts. With that frank guilelessness on which he seems to have prided himself, and which, as far as it was good, even Christ admired, he bluntly told out his unbelief in the question, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" How did the Saviour convict this man of the Divine presence? Christ told him his secrets; He looked into his heart, and exposed this conceit of an open and transparent nature, on which this guileless Jew prided himself, as being so unlike many of his nation. "Behold," says the Saviour, "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Nor was this all; Christ told the honest Jew how he had been praying under that secluded fig-tree, as pious Jews were wont to withdraw for prayer—praying but a short time before, and praying, it may be, about this very matter of the coming Messiah, to which the thoughts of his more godly countrymen were at this time so earnestly directed. It was enough: Nathanael felt that God was there. Very much under the influence which, in a similar case, had made the Samaritan woman exclaim, "He told me all things that ever I did," Nathanael cried out, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." Did the Saviour intimate that this conviction was sufficient, and that the matter of this man's new-found faith might rest there? Quite the contrary. Belief was to go on. Christ Himself might withdraw; but to this, as to every truly religious soul, conviction of the Divine presence was to become a growing thing. When Christ as manifest in the flesh was far away, when no one was near, this belief should go on till he could say with his great countryman, "Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. . . . . Thou hast beset me behind and before." Conviction of a present God was to be a growing thing; so Christ says, "Your faith now is only the beginning of the faith of the future; you shall see greater things than these. Through my mediatorial work you shall see heaven and earth united. Hereafter ye—you and such as believe with you—shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

Thus conviction first feels God near through some extraordinary manifestation; and, given that God's mercy spares, and His grace still plies the convicted one, the religious life goes on to all its future developments in the consciousness that God is round about it. The first feeling arising from a sense of that Presence is fear, the after feelings are love and joy, while the culmination is peace, even in the grim presence of death: "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." These Canaanites only knew that sense of God's presence which precedes judgment and destruction: every living man, in the one way or the other, must awake to a sense of that presence sooner or later. **II. The medium of this conviction of God's presence is God's working.** The Canaanites heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan, and forthwith they believed in a "God nigh at hand." (Cf. instances in previous outline.) Jacob beheld the wonders of God in his dream, and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." The centurion at the cross, and the jailor of Philippi, looked each on supernatural things, and each at once told out his faith. The chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus to death, because "by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus." The present attempts which are being made in the name of Science to banish God's working from the faith of men, touch the question of religion in a point most vital and important. Where "the arm of the Lord is not revealed," God's servants still have to ask, "Who hath believed

our report?" Give the name of "eternal laws" or "evolution" to account for the works of God; get men to believe that which the terms imply, and then there is no need for God at all. How much we lose, if the arm of the Lord is not revealed to us! Think of Belshazzar and his lords, when they held high carnival in Babylon. It may be that some among the thousand courtiers at the feast only saw the writing on the wall, and not the hand that wrote. But "the king saw the part of the hand that wrote: then the king's countenance was changed." To him the words would have an awful meaning. It makes all the difference, in our reading of life around us, whether the arm of the Lord which does the writing is hidden or revealed.

In view of the somewhat lofty tone of some modern scientists it may be allowable to ask, How much right have these who speak most dogmatically to speak on this question at all? It may be remarked: 1. *Every man is born with the faculty, or capacity, of spiritual perception.* We each come into the world with powers which, if cultivated, will presently enable us to see God. Men are born with capacities for seeing mathematics, poetry, and music; yet the work of a senior wrangler, of Tennyson, or Beethoven, would be utterly incomprehensible to an ordinary farm labourer. 2. *Of all human powers of perception, the God-seeing sense is the most refined.* Other faculties must be trained by a suitable experience, but this most of all. Let a man live forty or fifty years as if there were no such things as arithmetic, poetry, or music, and, practically, there will be no such things. May it not be so in the matter of these spiritual perceptions? Untaught men cannot look over and read a music score of a dozen staves like Costa and Barnby, or Stainer and Best. Can a man who ignores God year after year be in a position to see God? 3. *If not, how utterly incompetent unspiritual men are to pronounce on spiritual things!* Some men act as if mental and spiritual insight are identical; why should they be identical, any more than physical and mental perception? Each kind of eye is only good for its own sphere. Some men seem to think that scientific culture and spiritual culture are one and the same thing. They have mistaken spectrum analysis for spiritual vision. It is like using the microscope to find out if there is any music in the Old Hundredth or the Twelfth Mass. It is much the same as climbing to the top of the Matterhorn, where there is a wide outlook, in order to see through a mathematical problem. It is as though a man should take a telescope to try and perceive if his friend loved him, or seize on an opera glass to discover the exquisite pathos of the twenty-third Psalm. The philosophers appear to have forgotten what they of all men should remember,—the eye and the world must fit; the power of perception, and the sphere in which it is exercised, must be appropriate. Meanwhile we may feel thankful that men who have given a lifetime to find out God do not pronounce against His existence. We might be alarmed if Abraham and Moses and Isaiah, if John and Peter and Paul, if Luther and Baxter and Wesley, if Newton and Simpson and Farraday joined to say, "We have thought on this question reverently and devoutly for many years, we have tried to live in that spiritual purity which is said to be, and which, from the nature of the case, must be necessary in order to see God, and we come to the conclusion that while there may be a God, or may not be, we have no data by which to form any conclusion." Without judging others, it is a matter for devout gladness that in all the pages of history we have no names of men who, having followed after God throughout life in that reverence which alone becomes such a pursuit, and which alone could hope to succeed in finding Him, have turned round at the close of life, and pronounced their faith mistaken. It is at least significant that history as well as Scripture always shews the path of such as one that "shineth more and more." This world has tempted many to deny the faith; we cannot recollect that the grave has so tempted one.

"A candle wakes some men, as well

as a noise; the eye of the Lord works upon a good soul, as well as His hand; and a godly man is as much affected with the consideration, 'Thou God seest me,' as with 'The Lord strikes me.'" [*Dr. Donne.*]

"Fear is entirely based on a consideration of some possible personal evil consequence coming down upon me from that clear sky above me. Love is based upon the forgetfulness of self altogether. The very essence of love is that it looks away from itself and to another."

"Fill the heart with love, and there is an end to the dominion of fear. The love of God entering into a man's heart, destroys all tormenting fear of Him. All the attributes of God come to be on our side. He that loves has the whole Godhead for Him." [*MacLaren.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1—9.

### The Renewal of the Covenant.

Probably there is nothing throughout the entire book of Joshua which appeals to us more solemnly and more graciously than this most significant resumption of covenant rites at this particular period. The account of the giving of this covenant is contained in Gen. xv. At that time Abraham had no children, and the covenant was sealed on the side of God only, the vision of the burning lamp being its sign. Some fourteen or fifteen years later, when Ishmael was thirteen years old, the covenant was renewed, or rather completed, the seal on the human side being circumcision. The covenant was, that Abraham should have a numerous seed to inherit the land of Canaan, or, as it was sometimes called, the Promised Land. Here, then, at the very time of entering into the land, the rite is renewed. The land can only be taken possession of under the covenant. Not an enemy shall fall, not a town capitulate, not an acre shall be really their own, till that covenant is recognised by all Israel. **I. The relation between God's covenant and His people's transgression.** The rite of circumcision had been faithfully observed in Egypt; the rite had not been observed in the wilderness (verses 4, 5). This neglect during the wilderness life was, almost certainly, not because of any difficulties of journeying, for the people sometimes encamped for an entire year in one place. The reason for the cessation of circumcision lay in the fact that the people had ignored the covenant itself. They had said with almost one voice, "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." They deliberately rejected the covenant then and there. At the same time God rejected them. For the time the covenant was suspended. The sixth verse, therefore, connects the cessation of circumcision with the Lord's counter-oath. God would not have the people guilty of a solemn farce. Every act of circumcision in the wilderness would ignore this later oath of Jehovah. As confirmatory of this, it should be remembered that the passover was probably not observed in the wilderness any more than circumcision. Israel had been told to keep the passover "as an ordinance for ever." At the end of the first year, before the rebellion, they did keep it at Sinai (cf. Numb. ix. 1—5). Apparently they did not observe it afterwards till the occasion mentioned in this chapter. Here, then, is a most significant break. There is no feast of the Exodus, for the Exodus had been ignored; there is no rite of the covenant, for the covenant had been foresworn. What bearing has all this on us? 1. *See what God thinks of services that are unreal.* God would have no feast of the Exodus from the people who said, "Let us return unto Egypt;" God would have no covenant rite from the people who thought indifferently of the covenant. Both feast and rite would be hollow and false, and a mockery. How this old sermon of the desert comes preaching itself on to us, across all the centuries which roll between us and these ancient servants of Jehovah. Think

of it in connection with all the worship in which we fail to worship Him. Think of it in connection with many of the hymns which we join in singing, the prayers which we offer, and the heartless service which some are tempted to render. Think of the Lord's Supper—the feast of the new covenant—if there be no real covenant between us and God. God would have no service from us rather than a service which is unreal. He seeks the heart. Sham adoration is no pleasure to Him (cf. Isa. i. 11—15). 2. *See how solemn and sacred is God's view of His own promises.* All the time the covenant was in force the covenant rite was to be observed. The bondage of Egypt made no difference. Unlike men, God does not think His promises something to take notice of in proportion as they look promising. Difficulties and bonds and slavery made no difference whatever in the sight of God. In Egypt's darkest days they were still to circumcise their children. But they were not to celebrate that rite a day after the rebellion. God would not have two sets of promises in force at the same time, one of which contradicted the other. Oh, how sacred to Him is His holy word! It is all yea, and all amen. It is said that Sir William Napier one day met a poor child crying bitterly because she had broken a bowl which she had been carrying along the road towards her home. Having no money with him, he promised to meet her at the same place and hour on the next day, and to give her money to buy another. On reaching his home, he found an invitation to dine out with a gentleman whom he particularly wished to see. As it would interfere with his pre-engagement with the child, he declined it, saying, "I could not disappoint her, she trusted me so implicitly." God loves our implicit trust, too; but, excepting where He has made it thus conditional, the fulfilment of His word does not depend on our confidence. Each promise stands fast in His own eternal truthfulness. 3. This history suggests the question, *Does God, when we sin, regard His covenant with us in Christ as broken?* The history indicates the answer as clearly as it prompts the inquiry. It was not for every sin that God looked on the covenant as violated; it was only for this deliberate rejection of the covenant. The people often sinned, but it was only when they proposed to return to Egypt, and voted the covenant of no account, that God took them at their thought and word. So he who looks on Christ as "without form or comeliness," and thus carelessly neglects and ignores the Saviour for the pleasures of sin, puts himself in a similar position, and where God has no covenant with him personally. No transgression is so fatal as unbelief. 4. *Salvation is not in the covenant, but in the grace and love of God.* It is very blessed to be able to feel that even when God regarded the covenant as solemnly broken by the people, His mercy was sufficient for all the way of the wilderness. Think of it, a broken covenant, and manna every morning; a broken covenant, and water from the rock; a broken covenant, and the man who wanted to curse, crying successively, "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?" "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob;" "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" Think of it, no covenant, and the ark built prospectively, in view of its renewal; no covenant, and the pillar in which the Lord abode going with them all the way; no covenant, and the trespass of Baal-peor forgiven; no covenant, and mercies that should make way for the song, "What ailed thee, O Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" God loves us enough to bless and help and save us, if there were not a single promise in the Bible. He does not propose to go on with our salvation because He has become entangled in His words; the promises are but given to still our fears and encourage us by hope and assurance. As for our salvation, that is ever in the grace and love of God. **II. The relation between a renewed covenant and fresh acts of faith and submission.** The covenant was to be renewed by a rite which would, for some days, disable the greater part of the army in the very presence of their enemies (cf. Gen. xxxiv. 25). Too much stress, however, must not be laid on this. There would still be about a quarter of a million men between forty and sixty years of age, who were circumcised in Egypt, left to guard the camp. Still, man

for man, these Israelites were probably not to be compared to their disciplined and warlike enemies, and the state of the camp would seriously encumber their operations in the event of an attack. Perhaps faith was still more tried in the trial of their patience. This time must have seemed the best of all times to press forward. The two spies had reported that their enemies' hearts had failed them, and since then Jordan had divided to disconcert them even more. At the very moment when victory would seem easy, God detains them for one or two weeks. 1. *Getting into union with God does not mean getting into a state of freedom from trial.* He whom God brings near to Himself may even have to hear his Lord say, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." 2. *Neither does union with God mean liberty to follow our own ideas and wishes.* The Divine teaching in this hour of covenant mercy went on to say, "Wait on the Lord; sink your thoughts and desires in His." 3. *Union with God means that God is to be first in everything.* There is always time to worship and serve and honour Him. **III. The relation between a restored covenant and fitness for conflict.** Israel was to stay and seek fresh union with God before attempting to fight a single battle. The position is strikingly similar to that of the apostles, to whom Christ said, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." So were these ancient servants to tarry in the camp at Gilgal. 1. *If we would work for God successfully, we must seek the help of God.* Israel was repeatedly taught this. When the siege of Jericho did begin, God shewed them that He must be "all in all." The same truth was taught in a different way shortly afterwards at Ai. So all our conflict and service for Christ must fail, without God for our strength. He who would often win in the fight must often and personally reconsecrate himself to God. 2. *The rule is equally absolute in our personal contest against sin.* Israel learned to say in after days, "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help." God had so often helped them from the hills, as at Rephidim and Sinai and Carmel, that even their enemies had come to believe "The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys." It was not wonderful, with such a history, that the Israelites came to feel that everything depended on the presence of God. Let us not seek to enter into conflict with sin, unmindful of His word, who says, "Without Me ye can do nothing." The battle will be too hard for the best of us without Jesus. **IV. The relation between an intact covenant and the removal of our reproach.** "The name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day," meaning a rolling away, or, as Josephus prefers to render it, "liberty," still giving the idea of being no longer in bondage to this reproach. What was this reproach of Egypt? It is by no means necessary to contend, as some have done, for one selected phase of the reproach. It may be taken as bearing in at least three directions. 1. *There was the reproach of the long bondage itself.* The Israelites had sojourned in Egypt for more than two hundred years, and during the greater part of that time they had been treated as slaves. God had now rolled away this reproach; they were free, and were henceforth to be a nation themselves. 2. *There was the reproach which came of their longing to return to Egypt.* In this longing the covenant had been broken, and in the rite which renewed the covenant, telling, as it did, of Divine forgiveness, the reproach, in this aspect also, was rolled away. 3. *Then there was the reproach of the Egyptians themselves* (cf. Exod. xxxii. 12; Num. xiv. 13—16; Deut. ix. 28). All these reproaches were removed by the covenant. Bunyan tells us of the burden which rolled away as Christian looked upon the cross. The blood of the everlasting covenant can alone assure us of the rolling away of the reproach of sin. **V. The relation between God's recognised covenant and His people's triumphant inheritance.** When the covenant was once restored, the inheritance was only a question of time. No enemies against whom the people should be divinely led would be able to withstand them. "If God be for us, who shall be against us?" We, too, in all our struggles and fightings, may come off "more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 2, 3.—Divine Thoughts on Human Service.

**I. While Divine wisdom takes account of human ideas of urgency, God's ways are ever above the ways of men.** Men would feel this an unsuitable time and place to perform a rite which would disable all in the army under forty years of age. Men would feel that this time of fear on the part of enemies was the very season in which to press forward. God usually works by what we term natural means. Ordinarily He moves to the accomplishment of His purposes in ways which seem best adapted to secure the desired issues. To overcome the Midianites with Gideon's three hundred men, to inflict terror on the Philistines, and slay them in multitudes by a single man, as by Samson, or as by Jonathan and his armour-bearer, are exceptional and not usual instances of Divine working. Yet when God would lay special emphasis on particular teachings, He often departs from plans and ways which seem best to us. He who serves under God must not wonder if he sometimes comes to places where his own favourite ideas and cherished plans have to be set aside. **II. All successful work for God supposes submission and self-denial on the part of His people.** The way to possess the land is His way, not ours. His way may disappoint us, and may be a way of suffering, but it has possessions at the end: our way may seem easy and more natural, yet it leads to nothing but shame and confusion of face. "The meek shall inherit the earth." The words, "Father, not as I will, but as Thou wilt," may lead to the cross; they also lead to the riven sepulchre and to the ascension, and make way for the song, "He shall reign for ever and ever." He who thus sank His will in the will of Heaven said, ere He left us, "If any man serve Me, him will my Father honour." **III. God, who leads His people to wars and fightings, loves first to animate and strengthen them for the conflict.** The Israelites, through their own sin, had to endure the toil and sorrows of the wilderness, feeling that the covenant was set aside. They would breathe as in a new atmosphere now that they were again taken into union with God. They would go up to fight, having their arms nerved by promises of victory, made not only to them, but to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. **IV. The first of all our religious duties is to become reconciled to God.** Nothing is acceptable from us till we ourselves are accepted. The rite of the covenant, in which the people gave themselves again to God, made fit way for the feast of the passover. No amount of going to the house of God, no constancy in hymn-singing, Bible-reading, or religious work, can be acceptable to God from any man or woman who still rejects Christ.

"The path of duty is the path of safety; and it is impossible for any soul to be injured while walking in the way of obedience." [*Clarke.*]

"The Israelites were now circumcised for three reasons:—1. To shew that they held, and would continue in, the same faith with their father Abraham, to whom this sign was first given. 2. That they would be separated from the wicked manners of the heathen Canaanites, into whose land they were now come, and would have nothing in common with them. 3. For the mystery which was chiefly respected herein, *viz.*, our Jesus bringing of us into the land of life, by our drawing the sword, and fighting as it were with ourselves." [*Ferus.*]

Verses 4—7.—Qualifications for Religious Ordinances.

Consider:—

**I. The celebration of religious ordinances as independent of outward surroundings.** "All the people that came out were circumcised." Nothing in Egypt disqualified them for those rites of formal service incidental to the dispensation of the first covenant. The *spirit* of religious service is ever the same. That being so, we see that—

1. *Slavery is no disqualification for participating in ordinances.* The Israelites were in a bitter bondage; that made no difference to the liberty which they had in God. The Lord's Supper, ten years ago, might be partaken as acceptably to God by Christian slaves in the Southern States of America, as by any free citizen of the freest nation upon earth. The baptism of a bondsman may be as much a baptism into Christ as that of a freeman. In thus drawing near to God,

> "Stone walls do not a prison make,
> Nor iron bars a cage."

2. *Poverty is no disqualification.* The Israelites could call very little their own, but they might approach God in the rites which He had appointed. The poorest of Christian communicants is no farther from the Saviour because of his poverty. It is said that the late Duke of Wellington was on one occasion taking the Lord's Supper in the country, when a poor labourer in a smockfrock, not knowing who he was, came and knelt beside him. As one of the churchwardens whispered to the labourer to retire, the Duke, noticing the action, turned and said, "Let him remain; we are all equal here." Even so: the liberty of God's children knows no limitation from poverty. 3. *Persecution and contempt are no disqualification.* The Hebrews in Egypt could not call even their children their own; it made no difference before God that they were smitten and despised of men. Our liberty to serve and follow the Saviour does not stand in the good opinion of our fellows. 4. *Mental degradation is no disqualification.* The abject state of these men, who on leaving Egypt were so untutored and debased by bondage, was not one jot off from their religious freedom. Even in Egypt they administered to each other the rites of the covenant. The "Education Act" is a great boon to many as earthly citizens; no man needs it as a preliminary to intercourse with the Saviour. 5. *Ecclesiastical deficiencies are no disqualification.* The tribe of Levi was not then set apart for religious ministration. There was no high priest, no priest at all, no ecclesiastic of any kind; and yet, in this most ritualistic dispensation, even that made no difference. "All the people that came out were circumcised." The ordinance was not dependent on priestly administration. Many religious men in the present day are claiming large prerogatives as to the intercourse of their fellow-men with God. These men claim an essential place of mediation between each ordinary worshipper and his God. Perhaps no Scripture is more pressed and distorted than the verse (John xx. 23), "Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained." The circumstances under which these words were spoken are conveniently forgotten by those who press for auricular confession and mediatorial prerogatives. At the time when the Saviour uttered these words, there were no written words of the new dispensation to guide anxious men and women who wished to know if their sins were forgiven. The Gospel, upon which we can so readily fall back to help us in our anxieties, was not a word of it written. It is almost impossible for us, with all our light, to mentally put ourselves in the position of a man who, under the new preaching of John the Baptist and the apostles, might come to cry out in an agony of spirit for some assurance that he was forgiven. So the extraordinary power bestowed on the apostles was not even the outcome of their official position, but of the urgent needs of the anxious. Jesus breathed on the apostles, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." The Holy Spirit was so to guide them, that they should be able to pronounce to the anxious whether God had forgiven them or not. The men who felt sin an intolerable burden, and who had no written Gospel to go to, as we have, might go to these God-guided men, and they in turn should be so infallibly directed, that where they declared sin remitted, it should be remitted, and where they pronounced it retained, it should be retained. In other words, they should be so instructed as to declare the mind of God on each particular case. We even see something of the

exercise of this prerogative by the apostles. To the agonised jailer of Philippi, Paul says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and *thou shalt be saved*." On the other hand, Peter says to the commercial Simon Magus, "Thy money perish with thee." The "delivering unto Satan," of which Paul speaks, was probably simply the exercise of this declarative power. Other instances might be named, and these expounded in fuller detail; they should be enough to shew how utterly untenable is the priestly rendering of the verse in question. Even the ritual of the Old Testament gives no such place to men as this. There might be no priests; religious ordinances might be administered notwithstanding. **II. The disqualification for religious ordinances arising from unforgiven sin.** "All the people that were born in the wilderness . . . . they had not circumcised." The reason for this is stated at length in the sixth verse. On account of the rebellion, God had sworn a punishment which should endure to the end of the forty years. During that time there might be no circumcision at all. All the bondage of Egypt could not break in upon their glorious liberty as the children of God; what all the tyranny of Egypt could never accomplish, their personal sin had wrought in a single day. 1. *Wilful disobedience in any one thing is the rebellion of the heart.* We are apt to measure our disobedience to God by the magnitude of the things in which we fail to yield. We persuade ourselves that the thing is small, and that therefore the sin is small. The sin is that we have dared to disobey. One wilful sin carries with it all the heart into an act of disobedience; it is the rebellion of the whole man, until the sin is realised and confessed and abandoned. 2. *The heart that is in rebellion against God cannot worship God.* It is a contradiction. It is playing at adoration, and indulging in practical despising. It is an endeavour to mix absolute and essential opposites. 3. *God sometimes sees it well to punish sin even after repentance.* Many of the Israelites doubtless repented of their transgression. Even this repentance may have been largely owing to the penalty of forty years' wandering which God had sworn to inflict. If the penalties of sin could be all averted, and immediately averted, by our repentance, a premium would be put on guilt by the cheap facilities with which its painful consequences might be avoided whenever we chose. **III. The distinction made in the history between judicial pardon and Divine love.** The sin could not be said to be forgiven while the punishment continued. Judicially, the offence was not put away till the penalty was withdrawn. But God's love was every day proclaiming itself through all the forty years. The mercies which were new every morning were telling of forgiveness in the Divine heart. 1. *The suffering which men feel on account of sin is no evidence that God does not love them.* Given that a man has to trace his trials to his transgressions, there is still much to proclaim that God is love, and that God loves him. 2. *To walk gratefully in the sense of God's love is to have the promise that any present suffering for sin will be ultimately put away.* Just as every year in which the Israelites walked in submission to God, and in the consciousness that He loved them still, told of an ever-narrowing margin to that life in the wilderness; so he who yields where he has rebelled, and rejoices in Divine mercy, may contemplate the time when the love of God will remove all his present suffering. Even the cross of Christ may not at once put away the penalties of past transgressions; yet, to accept Christ crucified is to know the love and to have the promise of the salvation of God.

Where God speaks, it matters not whether we read prophecy or history; they are ever alike. Thirty-eight years before, the sentence had gone out against every living man of the host, saving Caleb and Joshua; it is only a matter of course that we read here, "All the men of war died in the wilderness."

The fact that the fulfilment of God's word is recorded so quietly, and that it excites in us so little surprise, assures us of the absolute truthfulness of Divine

words, and of our inward acquiescence in their statements.

Divine promises are not more sure than Divine threatenings. The graves of the rebels are as certainly found in the wilderness as the homes of the obedient are found in Canaan. When all the theories of men on the improbability of final punishment have been elaborately expounded and carefully proved, hell will still remain as sure as heaven; the "lake of fire," though ever so figurative, will be seen to have as much reality as the "sea of glass like unto crystal," or the "streets of pure gold." During those thirty-eight years which followed the sentence on Israel, there would have been time and room for a great many sermons on Numb. xiv. 28—35, in which some of the gentlest hearts and noblest spirits might have clearly proved the mercy of God, and the improbability of so many deaths in so short a time. For all that, when the years had ended, there were exactly as many graves in the wilderness as had been predicted.

Verse 4.—Fruits of Sin.

**I. Sin as the cause of our disappointments.** "The Lord sware that He would not shew them the land." **II. Sin as the occasion of much of our poverty.** The Lord would not give them the land "flowing with milk and honey." **III. Sin as the instrument of death.** "They were consumed because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord." **IV. Sin as revealing Divine mercy even more than Divine anger.** The deaths were spread over forty years. Space was given for repentance, and opportunity offered for securing eternal life. God's anger is not vindictive; it has little in common with the anger of men; it waits to save with an everlasting salvation; if it destroy some suddenly, it generally appears that these are so evil that they will probably prevent the repentance of others. Thus the very anger of God seems rooted and grounded in love.

Verse 7.—Divine Patience and Mercy.

**I. The Lord's independence of particular men.** If the fathers failed, He would raise up the children. **II. The Lord's steady persistence in His purposes.** Although the generation then living had proved themselves unfit for Canaan, God would not be defeated in His promise to Abraham. **III. The Lord's abundant and stately patience.** "One day with Him is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." **IV. The Lord's merciful beginning with individual men.** The children of the slain are permitted to begin their new life in the full covenant rights which their fathers had once enjoyed.

Verse 9.—Reproach rolled away.

**I. The reproach of man is ever of men and by men.** 1. It has its occasion in man's sin. 2. It is ever ministered by men: "God, who upbraideth not," is said to cause those who sin to be a reproach, and to bring reproach upon them; but He Himself reproaches not. The word partakes of the idea of taunting, and God could not descend to that. It is men, who also have sinned, who reproach their fellows when suffering for sin. **II. The effectual rolling away of reproach is ever of God.** The Scriptures abound with records of prayers to God to take away reproach, of praises to God for taking it away, or of God's assurances that He will deliver His people, and vindicate them against those who have held them in contempt. It is only God who dares to say, "I will *blot out* thy transgressions." **III. The removal of man's reproach should lead to the perpetuation of God's praise.** "Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day." The place was named after the mercy, thus declaring the goodness of the Lord throughout many generations. What memorials should we raise for the rolling away of our reproach on Calvary! The Israelites had only Gilgal; we have Golgotha. "Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach," who has taken ours away, that it should be remembered against us no more for ever.

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 10—12.

### THE FIRST PASSOVER IN THE PROMISED LAND.

Several events of deep interest are recorded in these three verses; probably there were others which happened about the same period, of scarcely less significance, of which no mention is made. Somewhere about this time the pillar of cloud must have disappeared. It seems natural to suppose that, having accompanied the people all through the wilderness, it remained with them during the passage of the Jordan; perhaps it departed from them here in Gilgal. Here, also, the tabernacle would be for the first time set up in the land. Here the ark would be deposited in its place; the altar of burnt offering, for the morning and evening sacrifice, would probably be erected; and the fire which "came out from before the Lord," and which was never to be suffered to go out, would consume its first victims in Canaan, offered as the morning and evening sacrifices. The first of a long series of observances, to be perpetuated through many years, were, it is likely, even now beginning to be celebrated. Conspicuous above all these was the keeping of the third paschal festival mentioned in these verses. **I. The time at which this passover took place.** 1. *It was immediately after the renewal of the covenant.* During what Jehovah called His "breach of promise" (Numb. xiv. 34), it was deemed unallowable to perform the rite of the covenant, and not less so to keep the feast of the covenant. Both circumcision and the passover seem to have been discontinued on account of the sin at Kadesh-barnea. God will have no service from us which is untrue, unreal, and insincere. Acts of worship are nothing in themselves; the heart must go with the act. The soul tied to an untrue and dead service might cry with the apostle, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" A service which had ceased to have any meaning, and which represented an untruth, must needs be corrupting in its influence; man should not have it, and God would not. With what care should we, who live in the greater light of these latter days, celebrate the rites and services of the New Covenant! Surely a meaningless baptism, which represents things which have no existence in fact; or a Lord's Supper, which commemorates the putting away of sin, observed by any who have never sought forgiveness; or worship offered outwardly, when the heart is still in rebellion, must be offensive to God. 2. *The passover was celebrated after a long interval of cessation.* Thirty-eight years had fled since the Israelites rejoiced together at Sinai in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. This must needs be a time of gladness. It must have been like the joy of the people, after a similar interval of cessation, at the passovers of Hezekiah and Josiah (cf. 2 Chron. xxx. 21, 23, 26; xxxv. 18). They who have been long kept from the service of the house of the Lord may well cry, "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" 3. *This passover was celebrated when the exodus was complete.* The people were not only out of Egypt, but in Canaan. In the first passover they celebrated the beginning of the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham; the second found them far advanced through the wilderness; this was eaten when they were really in the land. The feast of "Christ our Passover" will be ever fresh and precious, and the fulfilment of His promised deliverance of us will be ever seen advancing, as we continually bring our new experiences to aid us in expounding the meaning of the service. The feast may be ever the same; he will find in it no monotony, who eats and drinks in the light of past journeyings, past trials and mercies and victories, new camping grounds, fresh spiritual scenery and surroundings, and who marks that each commemoration finds him one stage nearer being "for ever with the Lord." 4. *This passover was celebrated preparatory to fresh conflicts.* Our feastings here are only to make way for our successful fightings. The Saviour Himself went from the baptism to the wilderness, and from the passover, which He had so desired, to Gethsemane and Calvary. "It is not meet that the servant should be above his

Lord." II. The place where this passover was celebrated. It was "in the plains of Jericho;" in the very front and presence of their foes. God can make us a feast anywhere; He can fill us with contentment and gladness even in our direst necessities. He fed Elijah by the brook during a famine, and refreshed him under the juniper tree when despairing in the wilderness. He gave Daniel peace even in the presence of the lions. He enabled Peter to sleep when in prison, and bound fast with chains, though he might soon be led out to a death like that already suffered by James. He helped Paul to say, when chained to a Prætorian guard as a prisoner of the monster Nero, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." He who bade Israel eat the passover on the plains before Jericho, has been shewing, through all the history of His Church, that He can make a feast for His people, irrespective of their surroundings (cf. succeeding outline on ver. 10). III. The events by which this passover was followed. 1. *The corn of the land became henceforth their food.* God had fulfilled His promise, and led them into "a good land." The well-stored granaries of the Canaanites, who had fled into Jericho, and the roasted ears from the cornfields of Gilgal, enabled the Israelites to find a sufficiency of pleasant food. 2. *When they had eaten of the corn of the land, the manna ceased.* The cessation of the manna just then would serve to assure them afresh that it had been always given miraculously. They would also see the necessity of at once going on to conquer the country, now that they were dependent on their own efforts for their temporal supplies. God works no miracles where natural supplies are sufficient. We must not expect Divine help to furnish what is within the reach of our own powers.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 10.—The Feast on the Battle Field.

God has literally anticipated here, in the plains of Jericho, the song which David sang some four centuries later—"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." What the Israelites at Jericho, and David afterwards thus realized, is still and ever true in the history of the Church of Christ. I. There is the satisfaction which God provides in the presence of enemies who SURROUND US. 1. *Take the case of the scorner.* Scorn is loftier to-day than it used to be. A recent writer in the *North American Review*, speaking of frauds in New York, said, "The cunning civilization of the nineteenth century is but a hypocritical mask spread over the more honest brutality of the twelfth." Perhaps that is not far from the truth. Formerly people who wished to commit robbery became highwaymen, and used for their instruments fleet horses and deadly weapons; now they study stock exchanges, banking methods, and practise all kinds of handwriting. Similarly the religious scorner has changed his weapons, and altered his bearing. Men no longer hear or use the coarse invective of the past generation of atheists and deists; the seat of the scorner has been removed to the halls of learning and science, and, excepting in occasional instances, the language of the scorner is that of a scholar, and his manners are the manners of a gentleman. And this makes scorn so much the harder for some to endure. Many young men who would be able to laugh at the ribald vulgarities of fifty or a hundred years ago, are concerned to find the atheism of to-day guilty of only decent manners, and to hear it speaking with the reservations of a well-bred courtesy. Perhaps it is only the young and the undecided on whom even this polished scorn makes any considerable impression. Those who have sat at the Lord's table, and have feasted indeed on the provisions of His love, little care whether the antipathies of infidelity are written down in coarse epigrams, or penned in the politer periods of a better bred animosity. The evidence of the truth of the Gospel is so sufficient, and its pleasant food is so sweet, that the enemies are often almost forgotten,

saving in the wish that they could sit at the table too. What would it matter to the hungry labourer, in the presence of good food, in what language or spirit an author might write against genuine bread and healthy meat? classical or rude, he would still feast. So it is with those who really rejoice in the Lord. The character of the Saviour is so strong and lofty and beautiful, that probably no one ever yet felt the beginning of shame because of Him. His doctrines are so lofty, their influences so pure, and the hopes which spring from them so exalted, that the people may still feast joyously, even when fronted by their foes. His name is indeed a strong tower, into which His children may run, and be, not only safe, but glad. 2. *Take the case of the patronising enemies.* There are men who profess sincerely to pity Christians. Those who keep festival at the table of Christ care not even to reject such pity; it is not worth the trouble, so they simply sit and feast. They have a gospel eighteen centuries old, and never more suitable to the world than now; a Master whose life and words never raised a blush, and "a hope that maketh not ashamed." 3. *Take the case of the seemingly triumphant enemy.* There are times when, to the superficial observer, the world seems to have the best of the battle. "The wicked flourish," and the righteous are "an afflicted and poor people." It is forgotten that they "trust in the name of the Lord," and how much of prosperity and satisfaction are contained in that. Paul and Silas in prison; Paul before Felix and Agrippa; Paul at Rome. 4. *Take the case of the worldly enemy.* There are many foes who are encamped on what Bunyan has called the "Enchanted Ground." The fascinations of the world. Too many, alas, fall here; but for the man who would really resist there are not only weapons, there are better provisions and richer songs:—

> "I need not go abroad for joys;
> I have a feast at home."

So in the presence of all His people's surrounding foes the Lord enables them to keep the feast. II. The satisfaction which God provides in the presence of enemies which may be said to be UPON US. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." These touch his very flesh; they come both upon himself and those of his family. Pain and disease and death are the lot of all. What kind of feast does the Lord provide in the front of foes like these? 1. *There is Divine forewarning to set over against suddenness and surprise.* Christ has "told us before it come to pass," "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Sorrows come unannounced by any lips of men, and they often come in rapid succession. Like the vultures, in the song of Hiawatha, which follow one another

> "From the invisible ether,
> First a speck, and then a vulture,
> Till the air is dark with pinions.
>
> So disasters come not singly;
> But as if they watched and waited,
> Scanning one another's motions.
> When the first descends, the others
> Follow, follow, gathering flockwise
> Round their victim, sick and wounded.
> First a shadow, then a sorrow,
> Till the air is dark with anguish."
>
> [*Longfellow.*]

Thus sufferings came successively to Job; he was able to say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Thus, too, Paul writes of having "sorrow upon sorrow;" he does but "reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." The Lord has so prepared the minds of His people for suffering, that they can meet it, even when it comes thus heavily, without counting that "some strange thing has happened" unto them. 2. *There is Divine sympathy to set over against seeming severity.* The love of God, and the sympathy of Him who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," have been made too manifest to allow of any place for doubt. 3. *There are Divine promises to set over against human fears.* Every one is "Yea and Amen," and the number and variety are so great, that no man ever stood where he had to feel there was no promise of God for him. 4. *There is the Divine example to set over against the worst sorrows possible.* Stand where we may, and "consider Him who endured" for us, He will always be found in front. 5. *There are the rod and staff*

*of the Divine Presence to set over against death.* Even before the Saviour came to deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage, faith could look up and say, "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." Christian history continually shews that when face to face with the "last enemy," the people whom the Lord leads are wont to hold festival. **III. The satisfaction which God provides in the presence of enemies WITHIN US.** Our sins are the worst foes of all; but, even here, Christ bids us keep the feast. 1. *There is an army of sins in the rear.* Can we be forgiven? The Lord provides "patterns for them who should hereafter believe." David; Peter; the penitent thief; the sinful woman who loved much; Saul of Tarsus, who says, "Sinners, of whom I am chief." Even Judas is wooed by the love of Christ, and seems to go "to his own place" only because he can find no place for repentance. 2. *There is an army of temptations in front, and the best of men feel that they carry terribly correspondent weaknesses within.* The habits of half a lifetime are not easily forgotten; the tenacious vitality of the nature, which is always having to be *crucified* to make it die, cannot but be felt and feared. Even here Divine provision is bountiful and sufficient. Those who testify to His power to save from sin are "a cloud of witnesses," and He Himself says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Christ our Passover is given:—**I. In view of sin's bondage and burden.** He came to give liberty to the captive. **II. In view of the sinner's gladness and purification.** "Therefore let us keep the feast;" yet "not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness." **III. In view of sin's judgment and penalty.** The warnings which precede the sinner's overthrow, and the power and grace in which God delivers those who harden not their hearts, tell at once of the love which would "have all men to be saved," and of the holiness which "will by no means clear the guilty."

"The first passover on the soil of Canaan: (1) A feast of thankful remembrance; (2) a feast of blessed hope. The bread of the land, although not manna, yet also bread from heaven." [*Lange.*]

"The passover would assure them that He who had been with them in the exodus would sustain and protect them now. The circumcision would remind them of God's promise, the passover would remind them of His power to deliver them, and the two together would lead them to encourage themselves in the Lord their God." [*Dr. Wm. Taylor.*]

"1. In whatever circumstances we are placed, religion should be our first concern. If ever there were circumstances which would seem to justify the postponement of religious duties, one would think they were those of Joshua on this occasion. 2. In whatever circumstances we are placed, we should put the most implicit confidence in God. These religious services were in an enemy's land." [*Bush.*]

Verse 12.

"God is everything to His people. In the wilderness they had no pathway; but He led them in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. They were in danger; but He was their defence. They had no water; but He gave them streams in the desert. They had no provision; but He rained down manna around their tents. So what Nature refused, Providence furnished; and what could not be derived from the ground came from the clouds. . . . At length the manna ceased, and wisely too. What was necessary before, became needless now; and what want would have endeared, abundance would have despised. This teaches us not to look for extraordinary supplies when relief is to be had in an ordinary way. He who sustained Israel is as almighty as ever, but we must plough, and sow, and gather into barns. He who fed Elijah by ravens, commands us to labour, working with our hand the thing that is good. If a man neglects the means of subsistence, he is not trusting Providence, but tempting it, and is likely to be reminded by something more than Scripture, that if any man will not work, neither shall he eat. Even in miraculous achievements, what human agency could do, was not done supernaturally. When Peter was in prison, the angel of the Lord opened the door, and broke off his fetters, for this Peter could not have done; but he did not take him up in his arms and carry him out, but said unto him, 'Bind on thy sandals, and follow me.' Miracles were never needlessly employed. . . . The manna

was typical. 'I am,' said Jesus, 'that bread of life.' As the manna came down from heaven, and preserved the Israelites from famine, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' And the Saviour surpasses the emblem. The manna was for the body: He saves the soul. The manna could not preserve from death always: but they who partake of Him live for ever. The manna was confined to one people: He gave His flesh for the life of the world. He therefore is the true bread.

"Shall this Bread cease? Far from it. You shall live by Him, as well as with Him, for ever. But many things now necessary will then be done away. Conjecture, opinion, reasoning, will give place to knowledge. . . . We are now glad when they say unto us, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord;' but says John, 'I saw no temple therein; but the glory of God and of the Lamb was the light thereof.' When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part will be done away. The fare of the wilderness will be superseded by the produce of Canaan." [*Jay.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 13—15.

### Times and Forms of Divine Manifestation.

The angel who here appears to Joshua was manifestly none other than the Angel of the Covenant—Jesus Christ. Calvin, and many since him, have come to this conclusion. As it was none other than the Lord Himself who wrestled with Jacob at the ford Jabbok, so that Jacob cried, "I have seen God face to face;" as it was none other than He who appeared to Moses in the bush, and gave His name as "I AM," though He is called an angel; so He who now appears to Joshua is none other than Jesus Christ. There are several things in the narrative which seem to require this interpretation. 1. This armed being calls himself the Captain, or Prince, of the host of the Lord, a phrase which comes near to "the Lord of hosts"—"the Lord of Sabaoth"—by which we are ever wont to recognise Deity. 2. This warrior claims to make the very place holy by his presence. God said to Moses at the bush, "Put off thy shoes," etc.; so, similarly, it is said to Joshua, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot." 3. Joshua is said to have worshipped. Referring to the usage of the East, when a subject meets his king, and quoting 2 Sam. ix. 6, xiv. 33, Keil expresses his opinion that the word does not mean Divine worship. The custom of kings, as has been shewn, is no rule for the conduct of angels, whom we see in the book of Revelation repeatedly refusing even the prostrations of men; to them the very act meant worship. 4. In chap. vi. 2, this armed visitant claims Divine powers: "See, I have given into thine hand Jericho." 5. In the same verse the speaker is actually called Jehovah. Thus we may unquestioningly take this as one of those Old Testament anticipations of the Incarnation in which the Son of God appears to men. It is what Isaiah calls "the Angel of His presence," once more drawing near to save His people. As a recent writer has said, "Thus the first and the second Joshua met, the type and the Antitype; he who led Israel to victory over fierce and terrible foes, and He who leads the spiritual Israel to the conquest of the world, the flesh, and the devil; who will finally cause them to triumph over death, the last enemy, and will award to each faithful follower the crown of endless life. [*Groser.*]

**I. The Saviour loves to recognise the spiritual life of His people, and when they seek to come close to Him, He delights to draw near to them.** Joshua had followed the Divine will in the circumcision, he had drawn near to God in the passover and the feast of unleavened bread; these are hardly over when Jesus Himself draws near to Joshua. It is like the Divine way in the repeatedly occurring words, "Turn ye unto Me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." 1. *When God graciously reveals Himself to men, it is to men who love Him and walk with Him.* When the three angels come, it is to commune with Abraham, not with Lot, albeit they proceed to save the man who dwells in Sodom. The vision of the burning bush was for Moses, not for Pharaoh. When the form of the Son of man is seen in the province of Babylon, it is with the three

Hebrews in the fire, not with Nebuchadnezzar on the throne. It was as they communed together, and reasoned on their Lord's death, that Jesus Himself drew near, and walked with the two disciples to Emmaus. It would hinder us, and curse us, if God drew near to bless us when we were living far from Him. Fancy the effect of the Divine smile on Pharaoh; it would have made that hard heart harder still. Think of Nero and Judas singing,

"My God, the spring of all my joys;"

of having occasion so to sing, and yet remaining wicked as ever; they would have been even worse than they were, had God given them His presence in their sin. God will not draw nigh to us, any more than to others, if we persist in living in disobedience to Him. It would put a premium on sin for Him to bless us in times like these. 2. *Although the Saviour does not now come to men visibly, we are not to think that His coming is less actual and real than it was of old.* We have all the joy of reading the accounts of these visions given to the godly men of former days. The very consideration of such mercy to them helps us also, by faith, to see Him who is invisible. But this is not all:

"We shine not only with the light
Thou didst send down of yore;
The fathers had not all of Thee,
Thy comings are not o'er."

Was not Christ as much with the apostles at Pentecost as during His ministry? When Peter was sinking, his Lord took him by the hand; when the Saviour drew apart from men into the glory of the transfiguration and into the darkness of Gethsemane, He took with Him Peter; but Peter never stood so near to his Lord as when preaching at Pentecost. Let us learn to feel that Christ is with us indeed when we in life and spirit are found with Him. His very name is Emmanuel. It was one of the sins of this ancient people, that they asked, "Is the Lord among us or not?" "I do set the Lord always before me," is, to the godly man, not merely a faith, but a life. 3. *Our more striking realizations of the Saviour's presence are not designed to be perpetual.* Joshua sees this vision but for a little time, and then it vanishes away. The mercy was transitory, or it would have ceased to be a mercy. The work would have been hindered, had worship been indefinitely prolonged. Moses at the bush, and Saul on the way to Damascus, do but behold the Lord for a brief season. And these transitory blessings of the old days are like our higher visions of Christ—we cannot have them always. Constant rapture would not be good; it would drain and enfeeble the life, rather than give it strength. In his "Scrambles amongst the Alps," Whymper says, with true perception, "No views create such lasting impressions as those which are seen but for a moment, when a veil of mist is rent in twain, and a single spire or dome is disclosed. The peaks which are seen at these moments are not perhaps the greatest, or the noblest, but the recollections of them outlive the memory of any panoramic view, because the picture photographed by the eye has time to dry, instead of being blurred, while yet wet, by contact with other impressions." It would not be well that we should always gaze as in our more vivid beholdings of God. Our better strength above may bear this more continuous sight of Him, but here it is otherwise. The vision needs time to dry. It is when we see the Lord for a moment between the riven cloud of some terrible affliction, or in the joy of more rapt communion, that the sight abides with us. When in a moment of ecstacy Peter beheld the glory of the Lord, he wished to prolong the vision, and cried, "Let us make three tabernacles." It was good to be there, and the servant wished to stay. The Holy Ghost tells us that Peter spake, "not knowing what he said." Even so, when the glory was so bright, the fleeting vision was its better form. And the fleeting vision was none the less permanent in its hold on the mind and heart. More than thirty years after, Peter could call on his memory, reproduce to himself the scene again, and write to them who had obtained like

precious faith, of the way in which "there came such a voice from the excellent glory." Probably it was more than sixty years after the vision when John wrote, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." Brief visions of God may be life-long helps. Joshua would never forget, in all his wars, Him who said, "See, I have given Jericho into thine hand." He who would always live amidst exciting services, and can speak hopefully of nothing but perpetual raptures, may be earnest, but is not wise. **II. The Saviour beholds the necessities of His people; and where they particularly need Him, there they may look for His special appearance.** It is over against Jericho that Jesus reveals Himself to Joshua; it is by the city that is fortified against Joshua, and on the scene of the coming battle. 1. *It is where we want Christ that we may look for Him.* What a blessed way He has, all through His ministry, of suddenly putting in an appearance by the side of some one in urgent necessity! How He ever seems coming across the path of the blind! How, when the impotent man at Bethesda had been a long time in that sad case of his, the Saviour seems to come that way in the very hour of the despair which feels the hopelessness of waiting there any longer! It is when the man has come to realize that he has no one to put him into the pool, and to know the certainty of some one stepping down before him, that Jesus comes. We look at the funeral procession leaving the city of Nain, and are apt to think of the Saviour's meeting with it as a happy coincidence. How many similar coincidences that sacred ministry of pity was always having! It is Christ's sweet mannerism of heavenly compassion to time His meetings to our crises. He loves to meet want, because His love to help the needy is genuine. Men talk about compassion, but too often, like the priest and the Levite of the parable, they "go by on the other side," lest they should have some opportunity for its exercise. He who is the Good Samaritan comes to the wounded where they are. Jesus has a heavenly way of being a "God nigh at hand" when men are ready to perish. Do we feel our need of Him? Are we thinking on our conflicts, present and to come, and, like Joshua, as he gazed on the fortified city, feeling they may be too hard for us if we are unaided? Let us lift up our eyes, that we may look on His form, who times His visits to our necessities. It is the Divine way to be near men in their hour of want. The Scriptures are full of such instances of His mercy. When we cannot bear to wait any longer as we are, then is the time for prayer; He, whose way often is to come when no word is uttered, will not leave us unanswered then. 2. *This vision was given to a man who had work to do for God.* It is not only when we have anxieties to disturb our peace, and burdens too heavy to be endured, but when we have tasks to perform which are too difficult for us, that we may look for His presence. He who said, "Without Me ye can do nothing," will hardly leave us to work alone in duties commanded by Himself. **III. The Saviour has regard to the individuality of His people; and as they need His help in that manner, and in that character, He comes to meet their want.** To Joshua, who has battles to fight, Christ comes as an armed warrior. In order to encourage and strengthen His servant, the very "Prince of Peace" manifests Himself with a drawn sword in His hand. 1. *The Lord has regard to our particular work.* He appeared to Gideon to encourage him as "a mighty man of valour." To the apostles, who were charged to preach the gospel to every creature, the Holy Ghost revealed Himself at Pentecost as a tongue of fire, sitting upon the head of each of them. As our work, so is God's help. 2. *The Lord has regard to the special character of our trials.* Moses should see, in the bush, that things which were burned were not consumed when the Lord was in the midst of them. What a help to the man who had to enter himself, and lead his brethren out of, the furnace of Egypt! Jacob the outcast should see the ladder that united heaven with earth, and hear the voice that said, "I am with thee in all places whithersoever thou goest." Jacob, whose life was to be one long struggle with adverse providences, should wrestle with Him who was the author of them all, and thus learn that he might have

power with God, and prevail, and come to great victory even through seeming defeat. The man of the unclean lips should see the seraph fly with a live coal, as from the altar of sacrifice, and hear a voice that proclaimed all his iniquity to be taken away. As we want Christ, so Christ comes to us. It is said that in twelve niches of a bridge in Austria there are twelve different representations of the Saviour, and that day by day men may be seen praying before the particular representation of Christ suitable to themselves. The mechanic will pray before Christ the carpenter, the sick and wounded before Christ the physician, the keeper of sheep before Christ the Good Shepherd, and similarly all through the various representations. Whatever our personal need may be, the Saviour has revealed Himself in sufficient variety to embrace our wants also; and if our necessities and trials seem peculiar, He shews Himself willing to meet us with appropriate help. **IV. Let the Saviour appear to His people when and how He will, the more graciously He manifests Himself to men, the more devoutly are they to remember that He is none other than their Lord and their God.** Christ comes to Joshua seemingly as a man and a fellow-soldier; He will forego none of the reverence due unto His name because of His grace and condescension. 1. The more God blesses us, the more profound should be our humility, and the deeper our adoration. 2. The more God vouchsafes to help us, the more complete should be our sense of dependence. "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" is meet language in which to confess our allegiance, and declare our readiness to obey.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

THE COURAGE OF THE FEAR OF GOD.

The courage of God-fearing men will bear examination:—

**I. In the light of history.** The Divine word to Joshua, that he should "be of good courage," was not spoken in vain. Walking out by Jericho, he was probably seeking to make himself acquainted with its surroundings. He did not yet know the mind of the Lord concerning the plan of battle; he would see where the city was strong and where it was weak, that his attack might be made with advantage. Suddenly, as Joshua lifted up his eyes, an armed man was seen standing over against him. The very place, and not less the attitude, was suggestive of an enemy. With no hesitation, so far as we can gather from the narrative, Joshua went unto him, and said, "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" Insensibly we are reminded of the similar appearance to Balaam. Balaam went forth on a mission of sin, and he, too, saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and having a drawn sword in his hand. How did this man, walking in the ways of sin, bear himself before such an appearance? He bowed his head, and fell flat upon his face. He did this at the very sight of the angel, and in a manner which looks more like the fear so becoming his guilty life, than this reverence of Joshua, who bowed himself to the earth only when he heard the lofty title of Him before whom he stood. All through the history of men, those have been the bravest who have feared God. 1. *They have been behind none in martial courage.* It was the son of Jesse, who feared the Lord from his youth, that dared to meet Goliath. Not a single warrior of the army seems to have thought of a deed like this. It belonged to the future leader of Israel's holy service and ardent song to do what the trained veterans of Saul trembled to think of, and refused to attempt. It was just because David feared the Lord, that he had no fear of the monster who had defied the Lord's army. So it has been ever since. Though war is not the chosen sphere of Christian service, and though not a few who have lacked piety have been unquestionably brave, the most pious soldiers have ever been among their country's stanchest defenders. "Cromwell's Ironsides" and "Havelock's Saints" found none to despise them in the field, let who would scorn them in the camp. Col. Gardiner and

Captain Vicars never tarnished their swords with their religion, though many would have preferred their religion apart from their military prowess. 2. *In conflicts on moral and spiritual fields, God-fearing men have ever stood in advance of the courage of others.* Many religious *professors* have been cowards, but not those who have feared the Lord. They have excelled their fellows in courage in standing by the weak and the outcast; in upholding commercial and social integrity; in bearing the trials of life; in meeting the last enemy —Death. **II. In the light of their peculiar subjects of thought.** In the estimation of some, it might be supposed that the particular subjects of religious meditation set forth in the Scriptures, are unfavourable to courage. 1. *All of Divine revelation lies over in the direction of the unseen.* The very name "revelation" suggests looking into what, without it, belongs to the invisible. To an ordinary mind that is not supposed to be helpful to bravery. Tell a man human imaginings of the unseen world, recapitulate the stories of "ghosts," and talk about "the invisible spirits that walk the earth," and the usual result is trepidation. How is it that the people who are students of the book which shews them that they are encamped around with angels, and that spirits of evil go about them seeking whom they may devour, are able to sleep with so few disturbing dreams? How is it that the men who meet God in every path are not timid? How is it that this constant gaze into the dark and awful invisible does not destroy the balance of the nervous system? It is precisely because these men have learned to look into the unseen world, that they are as they are. They have seen God; they have seen Him awful in majesty, but more tender than a mother in love; and they have learned to say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Thus do they sing, each to the rest,

> "Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then
> Have nothing else to fear."

2. *Much of Divine revelation deals with sentiment and emotion.* These things are not usually thought good for courage. Poetry and prayers and visions are not supposed by some to lie in the same direction as manliness and stamina. "Reason," men say, "think calmly, and wisely, and judicially, and then you will not fear." Christianity, on the other hand, stimulates the strongest feelings, claims the heart for its centre, deals with subjects of pathos and song and ardent emotion; its very key-word is "faith;" and the Saviour, around whom its adherents rally and move, is invisible, saving in works which declare His hand, and in words the latest of which are eighteen centuries old. And yet no men dare to sing in sorrow, and to be bold everywhere as Christian men do. Why is this? It is because they fear God. 3. *Much of Divine revelation is a manifestation of supernatural power.* Every morning's ordinary mercies make the God-fearing man say, "Thy mercies;" but supernatural things especially are only to be accounted for by the presence of God. Prayers are from Him, as well as to Him; comfort and help in the sanctuary are because He is there; any single conversion means that He is present; all the generous ministries of the Church, which come each from a true heart fervently, come of Him. The worldly and the wicked man is like the child with his head beneath the bedclothes, who seeks to shut out at once the terrifying darkness, and the suggestive creaking of the boards, or the moaning of the wind; the only way to his peace is the way of oblivion. "God is not in all his thoughts." "I will fear no evil," is peculiarly the watchword of those who fear God; sinful men have never made it their own yet, and they never will. **III. In the light of their spirit of humility and obedience.** Joshua no sooner knew that he was in this great Presence, than he bowed himself; "he fell on his face to the earth, and did worship:" he was told to loose his shoe from off his foot, "and Joshua did so." Yet this was the man who met his seeming foe with so bold a front. The man who bows lowest before God, ever bears himself most nobly before those whom he ought to count his enemies; and he

who knows how to obey the Lord, knows how to resist where he ought not to yield. It is sinful Adam who hides, and guilty Cain who cries, "My punishment is greater than I can bear;" it is Job who answers the tempter, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Verse 13.—The path of watchfulness and duty is often the place where the Lord is met.

The Lord often seems to be resisting His people, where He does but intend to help them.

They who meet the Lord in the ways of life, having, apparently, His sword drawn against them, do but need to inquire of Him with a right heart, when they will find that the sword is for their protection.

The godly man will pause to inquire of his seeming foes, with gentleness and candour, before he smites them in anger.

Verses 13, 14.—THE LORD AND THE SERVANT.

**I. The Lord's claims upon His servants.** 1. *Absolute authority.* "As Captain am I come." This authority is claimed in the very moment of revealing Himself. "As Captain am I *now* come." This authority is claimed over all the Church in common. "As Captain *of the Lord's host,*" etc. 2. *Profound reverence and adoration for Himself.* The prostration was not enough. Joshua must "loose his shoe from off his foot." This act of homage, also, was necessary. 3. *Holy awe for the place where He is, and for the things with which He has to do.* "The place whereon thou standest is holy. **II. The servant's response to his Lord.** The true servant has:—1. *Humility in his Lord's presence.* "Joshua fell on his face to the earth." He himself was revered by all Israel;

> "But merit lives from man to man,
> And not from man, O Lord, to Thee."

2. *Worship for his Lord's person and character.* The very consciousness of the Divine presence filled Joshua with adoring awe: the style and title were great, the Being and the character were far greater. 3. *Inquiry concerning his Lord's will.* He who says not, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" can hardly claim to be a servant. 4. *Obedience to his Lord's command.* "And Joshua did so."

Verses 13—15. THE TRUE CAMPAIGN.

"In Hebrew history the Infinite Artist gives us a picture of the mind in its fallen condition, struggling to deliver itself. The emancipation from Egyptian bondage, the trying pilgrimage in the desert, the special interposition of heaven in the crossing of the Jordan, the fearful battles that were fought, and the settling down at last in the promised land, are all photographs of struggling souls making their way from the thraldom of sin into 'the inheritance of the saints in light.' . . . The war scene of the text suggests three facts concerning man's true campaign. **I. That in the true campaign God has committed to man a great work.** 1. *It is an onerous work.* The work to which God called Joshua on this occasion was the utter extermination of most formidable antagonists. . . . Our work in the moral campaign is still more onerous. We live in a world of evil. Corrupt principles, the mighty 'powers of darkness,' possess the world we live in. They crowd our spheres of action; and, alas, they are encamped within us! The work to which we are called is their entire extermination, both from within and without. 2. *It is a righteous work.* . . . The man who consecrates his energies to the downfall of evil, whose life is one earnest struggle against the principalities and powers of darkness, is acting evermore in accordance with the eternal law of rectitude. He is fighting 'the good fight of faith,' and if he is faithful, he shall receive 'a crown of glory that fadeth not away.' 3. *It is an indispensable work.* Never will you possess the Canaan of spiritual harmony, moral approbation, self-control, uplifting thoughts, heavenly affections, ever-brightening hopes, and free and blessed intercourse with the Infinite Father of spirits, without the expulsion of evil from your soul. He only that overcometh shall inherit. **II. That in the true campaign God blesses man with a GREAT LEADER.** Taking the description which is here given of Christ as a figurative representation of Him as our moral chieftain, three facts are suggested concerning Him in that capacity: 1. *He is ever present when needed.* Joshua needed some special manifestation to reassure him of his duty, to inspire his courage, and to nerve his arm for his terrible mission. And here it is. 'He lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood,' etc. So it ever is. 'The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me,' said Paul. 2. *He is always ready.* He was not only present in the hour of need, but prepared. He stood before

Joshua 'with His sword drawn in His hand.' He stands by our side, and says, 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth.' 'Lo, I am with you alway.' 3. *He is all-sufficient.* He is 'the Captain of the Lord's hosts.' He is the controller of all powers. The forces of the *material* universe are at His command. . . . All the forces of the *spiritual* universe are at His command. He is Captain of the hosts of heaven. 'He maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire.' 'Him hath God exalted,' etc. With such a chieftain as this, shall we fear our enemies, or can we fail in battle? III. That in the true campaign God requires a great spirit. 1. *Joshua displays a spirit of indomitable valour.* 'Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?' This is the courage which we want, which we honour, and which we must have, before we can win one victory in the battle of life. 2. *He displays the spirit of reverent enquiry.* 'He fell on his face to the earth,' etc. This is the true spirit. Paul had this: 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' With this spirit, victory is certain; without it, defeat is inevitable. 3. *He displays the spirit of solemn obedience.* 'Loose thy shoe,' . . . 'And Joshua did so.' On whatever place we stand, it is holy ground, because God is present. . . . Did we always feel His presence, we should walk this earth with reverent and solemn step; feel that

'Life is real, life is earnest;'

and that the great end and blessedness of our being consists in working out the will of the GREAT ALL IN ALL. . . .

"Would you be a hero in the strife? Then put yourself under the command of the Captain of the Lord's host. He will lead you on from victory to victory. His victories are real. They are not over the body, which is the mere instrument of the man; they are over the soul—over the man himself. He who subdues the mind is the only true conqueror. The Lord's victories are merciful. It is love that nerves His arm. He strikes not to wound, but to heal; not against life, but against its evils and curses; not to destroy, but to save. Every blow He gives is to crush an evil and to save a soul." [*Dr. Thomas, Homilist.*]

## CHAPTER VI.

### *THE SIEGE AND FALL OF JERICHO.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. This verse is merely a parenthesis in the account of the interview, beginning chap. v. 13, and ending chap. vi. 5. The division of the chapters in the midst of a deeply interesting narrative of only eight verses, is most unhappy. Was straitly shut up] *Marg.* "Did shut up, and was shut up." The antecedent act of closing—which probably followed the escape of the spies—and the continuance of that act, are both marked in the phrase. 2. The Lord] *Heb.* "Jehovah;" the same as "The Captain of the host of Jehovah," in chap. v. 14. 4. Trumpets of rams' horns] "Trumpets of jubilee" [*Gesenius*]. The word, the meaning of which is involved in considerable obscurity, appears to indicate a bent or curved horn, in distinction from the straight trumpet. 5. Shall fall down flat] *Lit.* Fall down under itself. The wall was to fall to its foundations; the foundations themselves should give way. Every man straight before him] The overthrow of the wall should be so complete, that no soldier should have to deviate from a direct line in order to enter the city. 8. Before the Lord] The Ark is now taken as the symbol of the Divine presence, just as the Pillar of Cloud had been formerly. 9. The armed men went before] These are thought to have been the chosen men of the two and a half tribes. "The *chalutz*, or 'selected troops,' went before the Ark, and the *measseph*, or 'massed troops,' followed the Ark." [*Crosby.*] 17. The city shall be accursed] *Heb. Cherem.* Absolute devotion to God is here meant. Every devoted thing was to be set apart as consecrated to Him, and every devoted person was to be put to death; neither could be redeemed (cf. Lev. xxvii. 28, 29; Deut. vii. 25, 26). 19. But all the silver and gold, *etc.*] These had to pass "through the fire," and probably to be molten and re-cast (Numb. xxxi. 21—23). 23. And left them without the camp] Till they had undergone ceremonial purification they would be regarded as unclean, and, as such, they were forbidden to come where the Lord dwelt (cf. Numb. v. 2, 3). 26. Cursed be the man . . . that buildeth this city Jericho. It is exceedingly difficult to accept the generally received view, and to believe that this curse relates *merely* to the rebuilding of the city walls, and to the restoration of the fortifications. (1.) The old city seems to have been burnt, and utterly destroyed (ver. 24). (2.) A new city of some extent appears to have been built within the next seven, or at latest, within the next twenty-five years (Josh. xxiii. 21; Judges i. 16). Within the next century, Jericho became of sufficient importance for Eglon to make war against Israel by attacking it, and the fall of the city was accepted as the defeat of the Hebrew nation (Judges iii. 13, 14). It is therefore fair to suppose that *even within the first quarter of a century* after its overthrow by Joshua, Jericho began to assume considerable importance. (3.) This new city would perhaps have been even more easily built on a new site than on the old site. It is not likely that it would be *wholly* rebuilt on any site during the earlier years

of the war: a few houses on a new site would be accessible, whereas a few houses on the old site would be almost unapproachable. In any case, there is no improbability in supposing a new site not far removed from the former city. (4.) It is quite natural to suppose that a new city on an adjacent site would take the old names. (5.) If Jericho were rebuilt in the time of Joshua, or within a few years of his death, *it is almost impossible to believe that the people of those days would build on the old site.* (*a*) Joshua's curse was no caprice of his own; he was bound to pronounce it by the law of Moses (Deut. xiii. 16, 17). (*b*) The curse on a devoted city was irrespective of whether it had any fortifications or not; *the city itself was to "be a heap for ever."* (*c*) Though the law was ignored during the wicked times of the Judges, Joshua and the people of his day were too pious and too loyal to God to have set at defiance a law which Joshua had reiterated himself, and in the awful solemnity of which that generation had received such long and terrible instruction. (6.) Finally, though city gates probably suppose walls, Hiel's children are said to have been slain, not because of fortifying an old city by re-erecting the walls, but because he did "build Jericho." Both the curse and its fulfilment are said to have regard to building the city, and not merely the walls of the city.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1—5.

### The Symbolical Battle.

This plan of attack on Jericho seems to have been communicated for four reasons:—1. *It was for encouragement.* "I have given Jericho," *etc.* It is as though, in the character of Prince of the host, the Lord had said to Joshua, "Jericho is already yours; I have left nothing to accident. Each march, each day's work, the place for human silence and human shouting, the order of march, and the hour of victory, are all planned." Israel was to see the assurance of triumph in the completeness and deliberateness of the arrangements. 2. *These words were for direction.* This was the first conflict in the new land, and nothing was to be left for human discretion. God would have no hesitation before the enemy; every movement was to be firm and measured. Our Heavenly Father loves that we should begin aright. He says, through Hosea, "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms." So it is here with the twelve tribes. God would have His soldiers know His way of fighting. 3. *This outline of the first battle is given as an aid to faith in battles yet to come.* Christ told Peter of his denial beforehand, not that this would help him much in that temptation, for in that he would fall; but it would help him afterwards to see how exactly his Lord had known the poor measure of his strength, and the exact force and results of the conflict. It is the same here before Jericho. These words are after the manner of Him who loves to tell events to His disciples "before they come to pass, that when they come to pass, they may believe." How firmly Joshua would believe after this! His faith is seen nowhere more beautiful than in his overwhelming surprise at the defeat before Ai. When we are fighting for Christ, we should be astounded where things go against us; as it is, we are too often surprised when they make for our victory. This picture was for future trust. 4. *This siege of Jericho was to be a pattern fight.* It was to be a model and sample for all the battles of God's people yet to come. Certain principles are laid down and emphasized which were never to be forgotten. These may be summarised under three leading thoughts, some having regard to Man, some to Religion, and some to God. **I. Man's province and part in life's conflicts.** There is to be on the part of man:—1. *Diligent labour.* Once every morning these thousands of armed men were to walk round Jericho, and on the last day this labour was to be multiplied seven-fold. What else could God mean to say but this—"Though I have given Jericho into your hand, you are to work nevertheless"? Again, we are made to see in this history that God's promises should not lead to inactivity. If Antinomianism had only been found oftener sitting at the feet of Scripture History, it might have found that the way of God's predestination and of man's toil are so plainly *one way* that

none need err therein. Coleridge has made his Ancient Mariner say of the ship becalmed in the tropics—

> "Day after day, day after day,
> We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
> As idle as a painted ship
> Upon a painted ocean."

And so some have lain becalmed on the promises. Men have failed to work for the salvation of sinners, have deliberately declined to teach the way of life even to their own children, weakly and wickedly saying, "If these are elect, they will be brought to Christ without any effort of mine." Who could wonder if the ocean of Divine truth and precious promises became, to such, merely a painted ocean? Who could wonder if, before such a creed, and its correspondent life, those other words of the Mariner found a terrible application?—

> "The very deep did rot: O Christ!
> That ever this should be!
> Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
> Upon the slimy sea."

He who lies becalmed and idle on doctrines or promises, will presently find that to him they are rottenness, and that, out of their corruption, horrible forms will arise to affright him, and to make his idle rest far more dreadful and unbearable than his life could ever have become by the most arduous labour. God always gives faith something to do. 2. *As well as diligent labour, there is to be reverent obedience.* God taught His people to work six days, apparently doing nothing. It is easy enough to work for Christ when ground is manifestly being gained. Fighting is not hard work when souls are won to Christ; when an enemy goes down at well nigh every blow, and many captives are delivered. It is far harder work to toil and do nothing. The work of the treadmill is so fearful because nothing is done; it is but "grinding wind," say the wretched prisoners. Yet these Israelites were content simply to walk round Jericho day after day, doing nothing; and, scarcely less hard it may be to some, feeling very foolish, because of what seemed such aimless and useless toil. Thus Carey laboured for a lifetime marching round letters and languages and dialects, and probably some wondered how he could call *that* work for Christ. So David Livingstone spent his life in walking up and down Africa, and some well-meaning and good men asked, "How can he call himself a missionary? He is merely a geographer," they said; "he has been discovering the water-shed of a continent, instead of carrying to its thirsty inhabitants the Water of Life." So little did they know of what was being done; so little, perhaps, did Livingstone himself sometimes know. We can see now that in all that, to some, aimless marching, England's sympathy, America's sympathy, the sympathy of all Christendom, was being won for Africa; and that the heart of the whole Church of Christ was being brought to feel, "Those negroes must no longer be made slaves; those men and women must hear the gospel; the work of the great man who died upon his knees for Africa, and whose heart lies buried in Africa, must not be suffered—under God, shall not be suffered—to fall to the ground." It is very hard, however, to learn to do what seems to be nothing. The soldiers at Waterloo, who lay for hours beneath falling shot, waiting for Wellington's cry, "Up, guards, and at 'em," had by no means the easiest part of the battle. Elijah's toil seemed so hopeless as he cried, "I only am left," that even from his brave lips, which were wont to speak in other tones, there came presently the wail, "O Lord, take away my life." It is hard for parents to teach their children, when all their labour seems so useless; fruitless work is hard for other teachers, and hard for preachers. God shews us here that it is enough for us to say, "Am I doing faithfully and prayerfully and zealously what my Lord has bidden me to do?" If we are blameless there, we may still find room for the joy of obedience. 3. *On the part of men there is to be, also, patient waiting.* A week is not long at some work and in some places; yet it is long here. Think of it; a week of laughter from their foes;

week on the battle-field; a week of what men would call ridiculous behaviour in the sight and presence of death! The old typical battle often repeats itself; we too have to wait, and we are to wait on, even when waiting has to be like that. II. The sphere of religion in life's conflicts. 1. *In all our battles, religion is to be the prominent and central object before ourselves.* In the midst of the Jordan, the Ark was made to seem everything in the eyes of the Israelites: the waters were kept back by that. So the Ark was made to seem the centre of interest and hope before Jericho: everything was to be arranged before or behind that. Thus our life is all to be counted of and planned in the light of God. He is to be the centre around which everything gathers, and from which every movement is to be reckoned. In some of our battles we need look on little else than God:—take poverty; take sickness and pain; take bereavement; take sin. In each of our conflicts, God must be "all in all." 2. *Religion is to be shewn to be our one hope before our enemies.* We are to make others feel that every expectation gathers about the Ark. Men, in their earthly conflicts, are tempted to two faults; one is to keep religion out of sight, the other is to make religion a parade, in which attention is drawn to themselves as being pious. Our hope in God is to be firmly exhibited, to the confusion of our foes; on the other hand, no trumpet is to sound saving just before the Ark of the Lord; all the sounds of triumph are to gather about His Name and Presence. We must so manage such exhibition of our religion as is necessary, that all eyes may be turned, not to us, but to Him. 8. *Religion is not a system contrived to extol itself and its institutions, but a system designed to extol God.* The very first battle in the land of the covenant should be long enough to manifestly cover one Sabbath. For what reason was this? Surely it could but be to shew that God is pleased not to absolutely fetter and bind His children by the religious services which He appointed for their help. In ordinary times, Sabbath law was sternly imperative; so imperative was it, that a Sabbath-breaker had been already stoned before the eyes of all Israel. "The Sabbath was made for man," and so great a mercy must be rigidly guarded; not because it was an arbitrary and an inflexible command of God, but because it was so priceless a blessing for men. The sacredness of the Sabbath was to be jealously protected, even unto blood; the boon was so precious! But "man was not made for the Sabbath," and thus, when man's necessities became urgent, the Sabbath was subordinate to him. Thus does God lay down Sabbath law, and religious law generally, even in these early days. History tells us that the Jews did not readily learn this lesson, and that in after years many were slain by enemies who chose this day on which to slay men who would not fight because it was the Sabbath. Religion is not a God-appointed burden to be hung round the necks of His children, to place them at a disadvantage before their enemies. There are places, on the shewing of Divine Love itself, where Sabbaths must give place to men. The farmer must tend his cattle on Sundays also. The soldier must sometimes fight on the Lord's day, and is at liberty not merely to defend himself, but may, where needful, even assume the offensive. He who reads this gracious teaching reverently, will not find that it leads to lax thoughts of the Lord's day. By so much as God's mercy is gentle and discriminating, by so much are its requirements severe. It is precisely in this considerateness of our Lord, that a filial spirit will learn to stand in awe and sin not. III. The influence and help of God in life's conflicts. 1. *All real power for victory is to be seen to be in Him.* That is the secret of this strange plan of battle, in which Israel is to work hard doing nothing, and to work in absolute silence till the time comes for the falling of the walls The Lord is to be all our hope and all our trust. Each soldier in His army is to learn to say, "My expectation is from Him." 2. *With God for us, victory is always a mere question of time.* The pattern battle was to teach this also. No faithful soldier of the Lord, from that day to this, has ever gone on fighting in the confidence of that, and found it untrue. 3. *This symbolical battle, which shews that power is all of God, shews, not less clearly, that praise should be entirely to God.*

All the spoil, in this instance, was to be "devoted" to Him, as though He would have His people to know that everything, at all times, was His due. It is when we learn more truly to sing for victories past, that we shall find our victories more common and more glorious in the future. Some one has said, "A line of praise is worth a leaf of prayer." While it is ever His right, perhaps even more because it is for our good, God would have us sing, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory."

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verse 1.** HUMAN FORTIFICATIONS AGAINST DIVINE POWER.

**I. God designing the subjugation of rebellious men.** 1. *God sees the beginnings of rebellion.* He marks the abodes of men from the first (Gen. x. 18, 19). He beholds the iniquities of men (Gen. xiii. 13). 2. *God warns the rebellious by solemn providences and judgments* (Gen. xix. 1—28). The plagues of Egypt, and the wonders of the wilderness, with the rumours which must have reached the Canaanites of the purpose and mission of the Israelites, should also have been taken as warnings. 3. *God waits patiently and gives long space for repentance.* From the destruction of the cities of the plain to the time of this encampment before Jericho, there was a period of about four hundred and fifty years. 4. *When time and mercy fail, God makes coming punishment more and more manifest.* The rumours of the past forty years are seen gradually taking form and substance in facts. The cloud of threatening grows darker and larger, and comes ever nearer, till it hangs immediately over the city. To come back to the figure befitting the history, the military lines in God's war are being pushed nearer and ever nearer preliminary to the final assault. **II. Men fortifying themselves against Divine power.** The city was very closely shut up and strongly secured. The *Chaldee* says that it was "shut with iron gates strengthened with bars of brass." 1. *The efforts of men to resist God are always weak and foolish.* Iron and brass and stone, for gates and walls, are as nothing in the hands of Him who made them. Massive intellects, strong wills, and hardened hearts cannot hope to resist more successfully. He also made the minds, the wills, and the hearts which turn to rebellion, and rebellion does but make them more feeble. 2. *The efforts of men to resist God are manifestly weak and foolish.* The Red Sea divided, the Amorites overthrown, and the Jordan "fleeing back" before the approach of the Lord, might make it plain to any who were not foolishly infatuated that resistance would but aggravate ruin. When the Lord of Sabaoth thus compasses the rebellious about with enemies, it were wise to cry with Jehoshaphat: "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are upon THEE." God loves to help the broken and contrite heart even at the last hour. Yet do the rebellious foolishly go on fortifying. **III. God visiting men in order to overthrow them.** Sometimes Divine visitations are in love; sometimes they are in anger. 1. *Some men are overthrown that they may be saved.* Rahab and her family were thus delivered. Had others repented, they too might have been saved. God, who changes not, shews us at Nineveh that He loves to recall nothing so much as His messages of wrath. 2. *Some are overthrown that they may be destroyed.* Were Divine threatenings other than real, they would cease to have power; law would be at an end, and sin and confusion would run riot in an awful liberty. **IV. God overthrowing men by men.** 1. *This is His way with those who are saved.* Jesus Christ comes into our humanity, first conquering it, and then delivering it. As Horace Bushnell has so forcibly pointed out in his sermon on "Salvation by Man," deliverance comes from within the race. And it is instrumentally by men that deliverance goes on. It is "by the foolishness of preaching" that God saves those who

believe. 2. *This is often the Divine way with those who are destroyed.* (*a*) God suffers the unrepentant to be tempted and led on to ruin by their fellows. (*b*) Saved men will witness in the day of judgment to the overthrow of those who have refused to believe (cf. Luke xi. 31, 32).

"The closed and barred Jericho an image (1) of a closed heart; (2) of a closed house; (3) of a closed congregation. As the Lord gave Jericho into the hand of Joshua, so He still always gives (eventually) every closed heart, and every closed house, and every closed congregation, or even city, into the hand of His servants." [*Lange.*]

"Every carnal heart is a Jericho shut up. God sits down before it, and displays mercy and judgment in the sight of the walls thereof: it hardens itself in a wilful security, and saith, 'Tush, I shall never be moved.'" [*Bp. Hall.*]

Verses 2, 3. "JERICHO CAPTURED." I. God would have His people WORK. The work to be done by Israel was to be: 1. *Universal.* 2. *Done in God's own appointed way.* 3. *Done daily.* 4. *Done in faith.* II. God would have His people WAIT. This delay must have sorely tried the faith and patience of the Israelites. How could they hope to win that city by simply going round and round? Probably the citizens of Jericho insulted them from the walls. God has His reasons for making us wait. It is for His own glory, we doubt not. We believe it will ultimately be for our profit. III. God would have His people WIN. The victory is *very sure;* it will be *very complete;* it may, also, be *very sudden;* and it will be *very glorious.*" [*C. H. Spurgeon, Met. Tab. Pulpit.*]

Verse 3. "It seemed good to Infinite Wisdom to appoint this method of besieging the city. (1) *To magnify Divine power, both to the Canaanites and to Israel,* shewing that Omnipotence alone had achieved the work, and that God was infinitely above the need of the ordinary means of obtaining a victory. (2) *To try the faith and obedience of Joshua and the people,* by prescribing a course of conduct that seemed to human wisdom the height of folly and absurdity, and also to secure a profound respect to all His subsequent institutions, however simple or contemptible they might seem. (3) *To put honour upon the Ark as the appointed token of God's presence,* and to confirm still more fully that veneration and awe with which they had always been taught to regard it." [*Bush.*]

Verses 4, 5. When God makes religion to be the centre round which these movements of war revolve, and the power by which victory is won, surely He would have us see that we should engage in nothing where we cannot ask Him to be with us, and hope to triumph nowhere unless He be present.

In this world of sin and strife, the consolations of religion, and the help of God, have sometimes to be sought even on the field of battle.

Religion carries her trumpets everywhere, and dares to be jubilant anywhere.

The city was to be compassed seven times; but we must look for the reason of this in men, not in God. Omnipotence would have found one journey more than sufficient. 1. God would give sinners space for repentance unto life eternal, even when hope of temporal salvation is cut off. 2. God would teach His children that punishment is ever to come after patience. Even Divine vengeance moves with slow and measured paces. 3. God would shew His servants that religion may have to compass sin's strongholds not once, but many times, ere victory be secured.

The march of silence should teach us that the true soldiers of the cross are to know themselves to be nothing; and the shout of anticipation, that they are to know their Lord as faithful and all-sufficient.

When God makes a way for His people, each man may ascend "straight before him" to victory. The angular and devious ways which we have to traverse in life's journey are not for lack of power in Him, but for want of discipline in us.

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 6—16, 20.

### The Fall of Jericho.

In looking at the general features of this attack on Jericho, and of the overthrow of the city, there are three things specially prominent:—

I. The significance of the typical formulæ. Certain forms were very minutely and emphatically commanded by God for the direction of Joshua and the people. These are defined with so much care and precision, and urged in detail so particularly, that they cannot be passed by as insignificant. What were they meant to teach? What would God impress upon the Israelites by these unusual and conspicuous methods of attack? 1. *Here is a repeated and very marked introduction of the number seven.* There are seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days for the continuance of the siege, one journey round the city each day, making seven daily circuits, and then seven circuits on the last day. The long blast of the trumpets, the great shout of the people, and the sudden falling of the walls, were to immediately succeed this seventh circuit thus made on the seventh day. When we remember that God was avowedly teaching His people by outward signs, it is impossible to regard all this as empty repetition. We should endeavour to ascertain the meaning and force of this use of the number to these Israelites; then, striking off any differences between their outward circumstances and our own, the principles which remain will be the Divine teaching to us. Kitto, Keil, Bähr, and Hengstenberg all agree that this use of the number seven had reference to the covenant between Jehovah and Israel. Dr. Kitto points out very fully that this number has ever had remarkable prominence in many nations besides that of the Jews, and thinks that "the one great fact in which all this originated is the work of creation in seven days." Several of the following illustrations are from Kitto's remarks on the subject. Grimm says, "Even at the present day the number seven is curiously regarded in Germany in matters of evidence." In England we have seven years' parliaments. Leases of farms and houses are drawn for seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years. Persons come of age at thrice seven years. The transportation of criminals, the indentures of apprenticeship, and other similar matters, have had reference to the number seven. These cases have each to do *with legal covenants and transactions.* "Among the gifts with which Agamemnon proposed to seal a covenant of peace with Achilles, Homer speaks of

'Seven tripods, unsullied yet with fire,'

and further on, of seven female captives, skilled in domestic arts, the latter especially intended as an atonement-offering to the wrathful hero." It is said that "among the ancient Arabians, when men pledged their faith to each other by oath, blood, drawn from an incision near the mid-finger of the contracting parties, was sprinkled upon seven stones, placed between them, and while this was done, they called upon their gods." "In the Hebrew language, as in the Sanscrit, the words for 'an oath' and for 'seven' are the same. In the former language, *Sheba* has that twofold meaning; hence the question whether the name Beer-sheba, where Abraham and Abimelech confirmed their covenant by a solemn oath, means 'the well of the oath,' or 'the well of seven,' or 'seven wells.' If, in this remarkable instance, we dispense with the allusion in the name to the number seven, that number is still present; for before the oath was uttered, Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs in so marked a manner as to attract the inquiries of the king, to whom the patriarch answered, 'These seven ewe lambs shalt thou take at my hand, that they may be a witness unto me that I have digged this well.'" So Balak builds for Balaam seven altars in order to secure a covenant with their gods for a curse on Israel. Asa and Hezekiah, in after years, each brings his offerings in sevens, to renew the national covenant before the Lord. Naaman dips seven times in Jordan. This prominence given to this particular number is

seen running not less conspicuously through the Jewish rites and sacrifices. "The altar itself, at its original establishment, was to be consecrated for seven days to render it most holy. A young animal was not held fit for sacrifice until it had remained seven days with its dam; and so likewise the male child, among the Hebrews, was, after seven days, that is, on the eighth day, consecrated to the Lord by circumcision." By referring to a concordance, these instances will be seen to be only a few among many which go to illustrate the sacredness attached to this number by the Jews both before and after this siege of Jericho.

While fanciful meanings are to be deprecated, there can be no possible doubt that, in this attack on Jericho, God designed to call the attention of the Jews to His covenant. They were to go up to this battle, and to all of which this was meant to be a pattern, remembering the oath of the Lord to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, in all our conflicts, we are to fight in sight of the promises, most of all remembering "the blood of the everlasting covenant," by which alone we can be victorious. (*a*) Do we work for the salvation of our fellows in view of God's unfailing word? Is the work of parents for their children, of teachers for their classes, of ministers for their congregations, sufficiently carried on in the light of covenanted blessing? Do we not often go in our own strength to battles in which we can only hope to succeed as we go in the strength of the Lord? In vulgar phrase, it is "number one," and not "number seven," that we emblazon on our banners; it is about our poor weak personality that we hang our expectations, instead of resting on the sure word of Jehovah. How some of the old prophets were wont to cry, "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it!" No matter what was to be done, if they could only say that: it might be the captivity of a whole nation at Babylon, or a return from such a captivity; it might be a cradle at Bethlehem, a cross on Calvary, and a Redeemer for the whole world; if they could only say, "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," their utterance was ever given in the energy of faith and in the unhesitating tones of triumph. If we only went to our work and conflicts with all our hopes, like this army of Israelites, gathering about a covenant centre, we should not so often be talking about our own weakness, or about the hopeless wickedness of those whom we seek to win for the Saviour. The very fact that we are so disheartened at our own feebleness, or at the difficulty of the work which we are seeking to compass, says, as plainly as it well could be said, that we have scarcely so much as given the covenant a thought, much less our trust. (*b*) Are we bearing our sufferings through faith in Divine words? Is "number one," or is "number seven," the more conspicuous here? (*c*) Are we seeking to subdue personal sin, having all our hopes of victory gathering about what the mouth of the Lord hath spoken? Thoughts like these are surely thoughts which God meant us to reflect on, as He had these ancient words "written for our admonition." 2. *Here is the prominent position given to the Ark.* This has already been adverted to under the previous verses. We not only need the promises, but their Divine Author. 3. *Here is the impressive silence of the people* (verse 10). Not only did it need that the Lord should be there, but men were to be as though they were not there. They were to "keep silence before Him" whose presence was necessary, and not so much as to pretend that they had any real part in getting the victory. 4. *Here is the equally impressive shout which immediately preceded the overthrow of the walls* (verses 16—20). The Lord would have His enemies to see that He and His people are in close union. The men of Jericho must have seen that the God of Israel was doing all; the shout which just anticipated the fall of the walls would shew that God had means of making His time known to the Israelites, and that they in turn fully believed in Him. This is a shout of faith, and a shout of anticipating praise. **II. The severity of the spiritual discipline.** 1. *God tries His servants by commanding things which apparently have little adaptation to the end sought.* How absurd this marching

would seem to the critical Israelitish mind; and how the patience of the "intelligent" part of the host would be tried. If the dividing of the Jordan had not been so fresh in mind, we feel as though there might have been yet another rebellion. But this process of besieging the city, which looks so unnatural to us, was exactly adapted to accomplish the purpose of Jehovah. God was not waiting all this time to collect His energy for the overthrow of a few walls. He was not waiting to gather up His power for the destruction of the Canaanites. He could have spoken and destroyed the city and the idolaters at a word. The Lord had a more exalted war. His battle was with human hearts. He was seeking to overcome these Israelites rather than those Canaanites. He would subdue them to Himself with faith, and bind them fast with wonder and thankfulness and love. And whatever "intelligent" men might think of fancied absurdities in this conflict, surely there never was such a display of military genius before. These tactics of human silence and the quiet walking of so vast an host around Jericho for six days were adapted with infinite wisdom to overawe the Canaanites. We can fancy the fear which kept growing up for those six days within the city, which took on new alarms at the unusual succession of these silent marches on the seventh day, and which made the hearts of the idolaters to melt and become as water indeed when that great shout of faith rent the air and seemed to crumble the very walls to dust. If the Israelites had only fought a little more humanly, the Canaanites might have hoped; what hope dared they encourage before these men who brought with them a superhuman history, and then gave the history vivid realism by these superhuman methods? The very air through the whole week must have felt increasingly awful in the noiseless and tremulous suspense which, as the stillness preceding a tropical storm, silently heralded the coming God. And the strategy which was so divinely wise to conquer the Canaanites through fear, was not less adapted to subdue the Israelites through wonder and joy and love. God's way with the idolaters was wise; but *His real war was with the Israelites*, and that was not less wise. No one can think of lack of adaptation, much less entertain the idea of absurdity, who pauses sufficiently to understand where the real brunt of the battle lay. The world still goes on with its intelligent criticisms, passed now on the Gospel and the Church; and it not seldom misses its way altogether through failing to understand what God is about, and where His conflict is meant to bear. Men approach Calvary from a mental and scientific standpoint, and take their observations in the light of systematic theology; the strategy of the cross is directed to the conscience, and while it has enough of "sweet reasonableness" to make a feint upon the mind, its heavier and real movements are ever made upon the heart. Men discuss "the foolishness of preaching," and make merry over what they call the truth of the apostolic description; they do not heed that the larger half of God's battle may be with the proud hearts which have to cry, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel," and with the discontented spirits who have to hear. They do not know that *mere intellectualism* may be but a proud parade in mental uniform, and that, to some natures, it needs as much humility and grace to preach a good sermon as it might have needed, under the pretence of military genius, to march for six days around Jericho. These are but indications; but everywhere men are misreading God's plan of battle, and forgetting that half of His war is to take captive, through severe discipline and surprising successes, the men who are named "His people," but whom He is wishing to see more entirely His own. He could overawe the world with a word, if that were all; instead of that, He is designing that men should choose Him and love Him for what He is, and, humbling themselves everywhere to prefer His will to their own, glorify Him for what He does. 2. *God would have His servants feel that they need as much trial to bear victory as they could possibly realize even in defeat.* In heaven we may be able to bear triumphs without preparation; on earth we need go to victory so as to provoke the scorn of our foes, lest our victory should be even worse than

defeat. In our defeats, God's plan is to lead us through defeat straight to victory, lest we be discouraged; in our victories, His way is to lead us to success through paths of shame and weariness, lest victory be the most utter defeat of all. Thus does He contrive everywhere to make His people "more than conquerors." **III. The splendour of Divine triumphs.** 1. *God's victories are openly won before the eyes of men, but no eye sees the process.* Of old, and not less now, he saps the walls silently, and undermines them secretly. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." 2. *God's victories are preceded by an unaccountable feeling of expectation.* Jericho held its breath in awe; Israel marched on in outward silence, but inwardly was full of the joy of anticipated triumph. On both sides, human consciousness was acknowledging the approach of its Maker. So has it been in many of the revivals of the Church. 3. *When God begins to fight, His triumphs admit of no question.* Human fortifications simply serve to shew Divine prowess. 4. *The victories of God are each preliminary to triumph which is final, and to conquest which is universal.* This first victory at Jericho contemplated nothing less than the possession of all Canaan. Thus it is also in the kingdom of Christ; the cross contemplates a last enemy, pronounces that that enemy "shall be destroyed," and says of the greater JOSHUA, "He shall reign for ever and ever."

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 6—9.—THE SPIRIT OF THE TRUE SERVANT.

In the opening verses of this chapter we have the record of the Divine commands which were given to Joshua concerning the siege of Jericho. In these verses which follow, we see the impression made on Joshua's mind by the vision with which he was favoured, and by the words which he heard.

**I. The true servant gives reverent attention to that which his Lord says.** Joshua seems not to have lost a word, or to have forgotten anything which he was commanded. He was not so absorbed in the glory of the Divine Presence as to forget the importance of the Divine message. Joshua did not lack reverence; he bowed low before the majesty of God, and "fell on his face to the earth." Joshua could not but feel the greatness of the honour done to himself in this visit so graciously made to him by his Lord. He at once accepted the subordinate position, and said to his Divine Commander, "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" Joshua's profound reverence did not distract his attention, and his sense of the honour conferred upon him by God did not take shape in conduct which would prove him unworthy of such honour. There is not a word in the chapter to show that Joshua proclaimed to the people the fact that he had been favoured with this vision; he may have communicated it to the officers, but even of that nothing is said. Certainly no parade of this distinctive honour appears to have been made. 1. *He serves well who accepts his Lord's distinctive favours as a stimulus to work, rather than as giving an occasion for display.* God's honours cannot but delight His people, but the man who receives honour to parade it assuredly does not use it as God would have him. Whatever of truth there may be in those lines of one of Dr. Watts's noblest hymns, in which he says,

> "But *favourites* of the Heavenly King
> May speak their joys abroad;"

many have felt this exultant note of joy in favouritism was not written in that higher and nobler mood which best becomes those who love the Lord. Given that the doctrine represents nothing but the truth, the spirit of that single note jars painfully through the otherwise exalted harmony of the whole hymn. Our distinctive favours are to help us in service rather than in song; they are rather for meditation than for exhibition; they are not so much for others as for ourselves. 2. *He worships well who so adores the Divine glory as to*

*endeavour to magnify it yet more.* We are not to be so absorbed in our visions, and so taken up with our more ecstatic moments of fellowship with God, as to let them end only in communion. The glory of the Lord must never take away our attention from His commandments. Even Saul of Tarsus, ere he became a servant indeed, cried out under the bright light which revealed to him the presence and majesty of the Son of God, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" So Joshua, the obedient man of many years, asks at once from his prostrate position of adoration, "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" It is not enough to exult in God's glory as seen in nature, as seen in His attributes and word, or as seen in the character of Jesus Christ; the best reverence we can pay to Him is, while we worship, to hide His words in our hearts. That is the first step in the way to victory. **II. The true servant faithfully makes known the words of the Lord to his fellows.** The verses in which Joshua speaks to the people are so very like the verses in which the Lord speaks to Joshua, that they sound like a mere recapitulation. This is as it should be. 1. *Our human imaginings are not to be put instead of Divine words.* What we think is not even to be added to what God says, with any view of perfecting His plan or supplying His omissions. Joshua had been the general of this army for forty years, and out of his large experience he could readily have made suggestions for the attack, which would have commended themselves to the people; he merely tells them what God has said. He alters nothing, and he does but amplify in order to explain and enforce that which he has heard. Such is the spirit of all true preaching. 2. *Our human apologies or excuses are never needed for Divine words, and are always out of place.* If ever an apologetic tone in reiterating God's words were allowable, surely it would have been here. This military order was so strange. The people had seen something of war, and had some experience in war; and this command to march round a fortified city in silence for six days, and to shout at the close of the seventh circuit on the seventh day, must certainly have had a peculiar sound. Joshua does not explain the command; he does not even add a word to remind them that God had lately so revealed Himself in the dividing of the Jordan, that however strange might be His precepts, He had a right to unquestioning obedience. Joshua simply tells what he has heard, and bids the people do it. That is all that this faithful servant has to say on the matter. This was very beautiful in Joshua the soldier. It was like saying, "Obey orders, and ask no questions." It was accepting the orders of his own Commander implicitly; and it was the right method to adopt, if he would have his soldiers obey their commander. This spirit was even more admirable in Joshua the servant; it was as though he should say to himself, "Who am I to suggest aught of excuse for the Lord?" This spirit, also, is a pre-requisite for victory. Our preaching must have no additions to the Gospel, and no apologies for the strange ways of Divine mercy and love. Pardon without penance may sound peculiar, atonement through blood may appear both awful and strange, victory through faith may not seem the fittest way of triumph to us; perhaps he will honour God best, and lead most of his fellows to salvation, who simply tells out the story as it is. The philosophy of the cross is not the secret of its triumph, and preaching about the Gospel may be ever so different from preaching the Gospel itself. It is well that some should "explain the way of the Lord," no doubt; yet the exposition of Divine truth should ever be given in the spirit of its enforcement. The tone of apology, however, must always be as offensive to God as it is injurious to men. The way to victory is not that way. **III. The true servant not only hears attentively, and reiterates faithfully; he also obeys promptly.** Sometimes, in our prayers, we plead before God as David did—"Do as Thou hast said." If we would have God do as He has said, we must do as He has said also. Joshua looks forward in faith to victory, but only through promptly obeying the Divine word. When we can lose our

way and will in the way and will of God as Joshua did here, we shall not be far removed from triumphs similar to his. As we become perfect in the spirit of serving the Lord, so shall we become more than conquerors over the world.

Verse 10.—The Silent and Diligent Service of Men preliminary to the manifest Working of God.

I. The silence of obedience. There are places where we are commanded to "stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." Where speech might have been murmuring, and thus rebellion, "Aaron held his peace." II. The silence of humility. When the Lord fights for us, it best becomes us to let all men see that the battle is not ours, but His. As Mackintosh has said, "No one would think of bringing a lighted candle to add brightness to the sun at mid-day; and yet the man who would do so might well be accounted wise, in comparison with him who attempts to assist God by his bustling officiousness. . . . . The only possible effect of human efforts is to raise a dust which obscures the view of God's salvation."

"God doth not need
Either man's work, or His own gifts: who best
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at His bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
*They also serve, who only stand and wait.*"
*Milton's Sonnets.*

"The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him." III. The silence of patience. They who serve God can well afford to wait. The walls which fall not on the sixth day, will yet give way on the seventh. He who can only work when success is manifest, is but a poor servant; and he who can only fight in the hour of evident victory, is not worthy of the name of soldier. How the Saviour waited during those thirty long years ere He began His work! Speaking of Him in that period, F. W. Robertson said, "A mere *man*—a weak, emotional man of spasmodic feeling—a hot enthusiast—would have spoken out at once, and at once been crushed. The Everlasting Word Incarnate bided His own time,—'Mine hour is not yet come;' matured His energies, condensed them by repression; and then He went forth to speak and do and suffer. His hour was come. This is strength—the power of a Divine silence, the strong will to keep force till it is wanted, the power to wait God's time." Not less patiently did Christ wait after His work commenced. He knew how to pass through the midst of wrathful men, who sought to cast Him from the brow of the hill at Nazareth on the very day when He began His ministry, and yet not to be discouraged. He could endure to say, "The Son of man hath not where to lay His head," and not only to say that, but to feel the bitterness of such rejection as none but He could feel it, and yet to continue His silent and holy service. He could bear to know that "neither did His brethren believe on Him," and still work. He could see one apostle waiting in weakness to deny Him, and another in malice already on the way to betray Him, and then, glancing back over His apparently fruitless ministry, say to the eleven, "He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." He could enter into the agony of Gethsemane, expire amid the hootings of a nation who crowned their rejection of Him on Golgotha, pass into the darkness of the tomb, and emerging thence say even to the disciples who had all forsaken Him and fled, "*Tarry* ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Though despised and rejected of men, He commanded them to wait for the promise of the Father in the very place where men would have said failure was most apparent; and when that promise of the Father came, they were to arise and preach the Gospel among all nations, "beginning at Jerusalem." There is nothing that preaches to us, "Be silent to the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Ps. xxxvii. 7, *Marg.*), as does the Lord's own life. In its beginnings, throughout its duration, and in its earthly end, that Life seems to spend itself in telling out with Divine force the word of the ancient

prophet—"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." **IV. The silence of faith.** Silence is a time of power, not of weakness. T. T. Lynch has told us that

> "In silence, mighty things are wrought;"

and, similarly, another,

> "How grand is silence! In her tranquil deeps
> What mighty things are born!"

and Faber—"When God spake all things into being, the everlasting silence remained unbroken. No stir was seen, no commotion felt. The starting into life of ten thousand times ten thousand millions of angels from the deep abyss of eternity, created no noise. The creation of millions upon millions of worlds, by the fiat of His matchless power, was done in noiselessness and peace." Man may need commotion and disturbance to assure him that work is being done, silence is sufficient for God; and sometimes, as here around Jericho, God asks His children to believe, although there is nothing but Himself on which their faith can rest. When His children do thus rest in faith, they are content to walk on in the same silence out of which God so loves to evolve His mightiest works. **V. The silence of expectation and awe.** We feel as if this very shout must have had, almost within it, a silence intense, profound, and absolutely awful. In his "Battle of the Baltic," when the fleets of England and Denmark had met, and were about to engage, Campbell tells us,

> "There was silence deep as death;
> And the boldest held his breath,
> For a time:
> . . . . . .
> When each gun
> From its adamantine lips
> Spread a death-shade round the ships,
> Like the hurricane eclipse
> Of the sun."

So intense and terrible do we feel the silence must have been which preceded, and which again immediately succeeded this fear-filling shout from six hundred thousand believing men. When they had thus given Jehovah's chosen sign for His own working to commence, what would God do?—the God who had made a path through the sea, and divided the Jordan; how would He begin *His war* on Jericho? Joshua knew how; but had he told the people? It seems not; and yet all Israel must have felt that this was the crisis. How would Omnipotence declare itself? We can almost feel, even now, the bated breath that made silence painful ere that shout was given, and the yet more awful stillness, coupled as it would be with intense gazing and terrible expectation, which abruptly followed—so abruptly, perhaps, that all straggling sounds of single lingering voices were choked back in the solemn hush that fell like a spell upon the host. What would God do now? And then, almost as they ask that silent question, the walls fall in upon themselves, a cloud of dust arises right round the city, another solemn stillness succeeds the murmur of awe among the Israelites which the sight had involuntarily provoked; the cloud clears away, fear and pain have taken hold upon the fleeing idolaters; then the trumpets of the priests suddenly sound forth in the midst of the hosts of Israel, and the army of the Lord charges on the devoted city on all sides at once, and proceeds to execute the terrible ban of *cherem* in slaughter and burning.

If such be the temporal punishment of sin, what must be its final judgment? If such be the awe gathering around the overthrow of one guilty city, what of those moments when the hosts of the wicked of all time stand before the judgment seat of Christ? "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." In that day it shall again be said, "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God."

Verse 11. **I. The first day of obedient service on the part of the Lord's people.** No murmurings are recorded as having been uttered against doing a meaningless task. In days like these, no desertions occur from the army of the Lord to the side of the

Lord's enemies. Contempt and scorn would hardly be felt by those who had seen the mercy of Jehovah in the dividing of the river. Rest must have been sweet on the night succeeding this day's toil; it was the rest of obedience overshadowed by mercies which were hardly past, and made refreshing by promises almost fulfilled. **II. The first day of more direct and solemn warning to the Lord's enemies.** The general warnings of Providence and Scripture will have a day in which they will begin to assume definite shape to every man who has not repented of sin (cf. Matt. xxiv. 32—34). As with the inhabitants of Jericho and Jerusalem, so must it be to all who fear not God. The day will come in which dispersed threatenings will be seen concentrating themselves for judgment.

The warnings of one day are very like those of another; even when they are most solemn, it is possible to become almost comfortably familiar with them. On the morning of the seventh day the men of Jericho had perhaps learned to say to each other almost pleasantly, "All things continue they were from the beginning."

It is significant, however, that we have no single word of record to guide us as to the feeling which prevailed in Jericho from this first day of compassing the city to the day when it fell. Not so much as a sound of either scorn or fear reaches us to tell us what these men felt. All seems purposely shut off in the darkness of oblivion. What a picture of many other deaths, and how like the speechless stillness which follows them! As yet, eternity gives no sign.

Verses 12—20. JERICHO TAKEN.

"**I. The city which was to be taken.** Jericho was a city of great antiquity and importance. It was inclosed by walls so considerable that houses were built upon them (chap. ii. 15), while the spoil that was found in it is an evidence of its opulence. When the tribes made their encampment in Gilgal, the inhabitants caused the city to be straitly shut up, so that "none went out and none came in." But they could not shut out God. There are no gates and bars that can stand against Him. How vainly they reckon who leave God out of their calculations! When He is with us, no opposing host can harm us; but when He is against us, no earthly walls can protect us. **II. The means by which it was taken.** These were very peculiar. . . . 1. There was no natural fitness in the means to produce the end designed. 2. The means employed were such as would provoke the ridicule of the besieged. 3. The means employed produced no effect whatever for six days, nor even on the seventh, until the shout was raised at the last. **III. The disposition that was to be made of the city.** It was to be accursed, or devoted, to God. The Israelites in destroying the inhabitants of Jericho and the Canaanites generally, were but the instruments in God's hand of carrying out His sentence.

LESSONS: 1. Retribution though long delayed comes at last. God's judgments have leaden feet, and so they come slowly; but they have iron hands, and so they strike deadly when they come. 2. Faith does what God says, and asks no questions. 3. At the sound of the trumpets of the priests, the walls of Jericho fell down. By the preaching of the Gospel the strongholds of sin and Satan are to be overthrown. 4. Let us not be impatient of results when we are doing God's commands. 5. Success in our working for God is His doing, not ours, and so the whole glory of it should be given to Him." [*William Taylor, D.D.*]

Verse 20.

**I. God gives His servants success when they are prepared for it, and as they are able to bear it.** A London minister, whose work for the past nine years has been marked by great prosperity, recently made the following statement at a public meeting: "With the first church over which I was called to preside, I spent four years in what seemed an almost fruitless ministry. I think I preached as fervently then as I preach now, and I prayed for God's blessing with all my heart. I looked for success, and week by week announced times at which I would meet enquirers, but none came. I prayed till prayer became an agony within me; still there were no converts. On one Sunday evening I made a special effort to win souls to Christ. All through the preceding week I pleaded, as though I were pouring out my very soul, for a blessing on that service. I prepared, as far as I knew how, simply with a view to conversion. On the evening before the service in question, I went into a field at the back of the chapel, and again, with tears, I besought God to save some. I gave out that I would meet enquirers at the close of the service; not one came either then or afterwards as the fruit of that appeal. Eight years ago," said the speaker, "I preached *the same sermon* in what was then my new sphere of labour, and ninety-seven persons joined the Church, who traced their conversion to that one discourse." The minister concluded by saying, "I think that in my four years of fruitless labour the Lord was enabling me to bear present success, and

getting me in a fit mind to endure the large measure of prosperity with which I have been cheered for the past nine years." II. When God gives His servants success, He ever gives it to their faith alone, and yet never bestows it without their work. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down," but they did not fall till "after they had been compassed about seven days." Works are of no use, as is most manifest in this siege, yet God will give no blessing without the works. Some might say, "That is the precise point in dispute between Paul and James; Paul tells us that we must have faith, and James that we must have works." True, they do say that; but there is no dispute between Paul and James. Paul says that we are justified by faith, meaning, of course, a good faith; and James does but assure us that that only is a good and real faith which has works. Perhaps the late F. W. Robertson's illustration gives one of the best definitions of the difference and agreement between the two apostles: "Suppose I say, 'A tree cannot be struck without thunder:' that is true, for there is never destructive lightning without thunder. But, again, if I say, 'The tree was struck by lightning without thunder:' that is true too, if I mean that the lightning alone struck it, without the thunder striking it. Yet read the two assertions, and they seem contradictory. So in the same way, St. Paul says, 'Faith justifies without works;' that is, faith alone is that which justifies us, not works. But St. James says, 'Not a faith which is without works.' There will be works with faith, as there is thunder with lightning, but just as it is not the thunder, but the lightning (the lightning without the thunder), that strikes the tree, so it is not the works which justify. Put it in one sentence, —*faith alone justifies, but not the faith which is alone.* Lightning alone strikes, but not the lightning which is alone, without thunder; for that is only summer lightning, and harmless." The works of the Israelites before Jericho stood in the same relation to the fall of the walls. The works accomplished absolutely nothing; by faith the walls fell down: it is equally true that the faith would have been as powerless as the works, had it not been accompanied by the works. Our faith alone is effectual to command the help of God; but if our faith is alone, as having no works, it is not a faith which God will accept.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 17—19.

### Devoted Things.

The word "accursed," which is used in this passage, does not so well represent the meaning of the Hebrew "*cherem*" as the word "devoted," given in the margin. To our English ears, the former word is apt to convey an idea of anger and cursing, which is not contained in the original. The "devoted" persons or things, among the Israelites, were persons or things *doomed* to destruction, or *cut off* from common uses in perpetual consecration to the use or service of God. The idea of votive offerings was not confined to the Jews; it runs, more or less conspicuously, through all human history, and is particularly prominent in that of the Romans. The ancients believed that the life of one man might be ransomed by the death of another, or that even a national boon might be purchased by such a sacrifice; hence such legends as that of Curtius, who is said to have "devoted" himself for the good of Rome by riding into the chasm which had opened in the Forum. It is said that devotion to *any particular person* was unknown among the Romans till the time of Augustus. "The day after the title of Augustus had been conferred upon Octavius, Pacuvius, a tribune of the people, publicly declared that he would devote himself to Augustus, and obey him at the expense of his life, should he be so commanded. This example of flattery was immediately followed by all the rest, till at length it became an established custom never to go to salute the Emperor without declaring that they were devoted to him." It may thus readily be seen through what process the idea of devoting one's self lost its former sacrificial, or at least solemn, import, till it became a mere hyperbole of social flattery, and presently, also, a form of speech to indicate strictness of attention to any business profession or pursuit. To this day, the very word of the Israelites is perpetuated in the East, the Turkish word *harem* coming, through the Arabic, from the Hebrew *cherem*. The Old Testament has many allusions to the practice of devoting things or persons to the Lord; and even in the New Testament, we find Paul devoting his hair at Cenchrea, saying that for the sake of his kinsmen in the flesh he could

wish himself accursed (ἀνάθεμα) from Christ, and proclaiming any preacher of "another gospel," and, elsewhere, any man who should "love not the Lord Jesus Christ," to be *anathema*. Much obscurity gathers round the whole subject. The following questions will indicate some of the difficulties. Who was authorised to put men and things under the ban of devotion; might God alone do this, or might men also do it? If men might devote things, what men were qualified to pronounce the ban? Could a man pronounce the possessions of another to be devoted, or could he merely place his own under ban? Could one person devote another? What was the effect of the ban? Did it invariably involve the death of persons, and the destruction of all things not indestructible? Might the devotion be partial, as is seemingly the case in the instances of Samuel and Samson, and if partial, would this still be called *cherem?* These are some of the questions raised by this solemn and involved subject.

### Jericho Devoted.

The claim that this city should be devoted was made by God, was most solemnly enjoined on all Israel, and was still more solemnly enforced by the death of Achan. What did God intend to teach men by this claim? The mere surroundings of the case are local and temporary; the principles of deep spiritual teaching, which are indicated by the solemnity of the case, were surely meant to be eternal. **I. In the wars of the Lord, the only right which there may be to any spoils is the right of the Lord Himself.** The Israelites, and all God's people subsequently, were to learn that. God puts out His Hand, in this very first battle, and says, in effect, "The spoils of victory are all Mine." Israel was to take nothing, and the stern penalty of disobedience was death. Such is the measure of the Divine claim on the Church of Christ. Like the Israelites, we are but redeemed slaves, they having been delivered from Egypt, and we from a harder bondage. Everything which we may win in the spiritual conflict belongs to the Lord. To each one of us He says, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price." 1. *We are not to serve the Saviour merely for what we can get.* Archbishop Secker used to say, "God has three sorts of servants in the world: some are slaves, and serve Him from fear; others are hirelings, and serve for wages; and the last are sons, who serve because they love." How are we putting our hands to the work of Christ? Is it from fear? Do we merely seek to gain a name, a place, a measure of the world's respect, and a possession in personal peace; or do we love Him to whom we owe liberty and all we have? He has *devoted* Himself for us. Look into the cradle at Bethlehem—that manger cradle—and you see there a devoted body; it is the *cherem* of His humanity, in which He gave Himself for us. See Him in the ministry, toiling now, and now saying, "The Son of man hath not where to lay His head;" that ministry is the *cherem* of His devotion in service. Regard Him as one "who did no sin;" and this cutting off unto *manifest holiness* has reference to His disciples, of whom he says, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself." Contemplate Him in the sorrow of Gethsemane, when "being in an agony He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground;" that was His devotion of Himself to men in spiritual suffering. Think of Calvary, where He poured out His soul unto death, and crowned even His sacrifice in the cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" there, says His apostle, He was "made a curse for us; for it is written, 'Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.'" Surely when we see the Saviour's gift of Himself for our redemption, we might serve from some higher motives than those of fear and gain, and freely own that what we are, what we have, and all we may win through His power and love, belong not unto us, but unto the Lord. 2. *Where God causes us to triumph, we are not to claim the glory.* The rights are all God's. He does but put His Hand on the whole of Jericho as indicating the measure of spoil and honour which ever belong to Himself. When Nebuchadnezzar exalted himself, and said, "This is great Babylon which I have builded," he was driven

out among the beasts to become as one of them: it was but God's other way of saying, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but this man doth not know, neither doth he consider." The man who was more ungrateful than the beasts, God drove forth among the beasts. It is said that Pope John XXI. built for himself a noble chamber in the palace of Viterbo, and that he was crushed to death by the falling in of the roof, which he vaingloriously admired. Dean Milman says of the occurrence: "John was contemplating with too great pride the work of his own hands, and burst out into laughter; when, at that instant, the avenging roof came down upon his head." That is ever the result, when we are foolishly taken up in our own work, and are found glorying in it as something which we have done. Our very self-esteem, like Achan's selfishness, has a way of making us *cherem*. When we can come to the knowledge of what belongeth unto God in no better way, the very consequences of our misappropriation become vocal, and say, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." **II. God, to whom all the spoils in life's conflicts belong as a matter of right, gives us much for ourselves, and claims only the firstfruits.** 1. *God does not claim all.* He puts no other city under ban like this, but simply requires Jericho. God has thought for the homage due unto His name, but more thought still for His people's welfare: He would claim one city, they should have many. This has ever been the way of Divine mercy. *God has thought for the poor.* He only claims from men according to their ability (cf. Lev. xxvii. 8). *God has thought for the busy.* He merely demands one day in seven. *God has thought for men in the weakness which leads them to serve in view of rewards.* He does not shut men out from these lower motives. The Saviour, who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," graciously stimulates men by thoughts of the pain and loss which they can avoid in being His disciples, and by thoughts of peace and joy and heaven which they can make their own by cleaving to Him. There is a legend of Bishop Ivo in which he is described as meeting one day a figure in the form of a woman, of a sad and earnest aspect, like some prophetess of God, who carried a vessel of fire in one hand, and of water in the other. He asked her what these things were for. She answered, "The fire is to burn up Paradise, and the water is to quench Hell, that men may henceforth serve their Maker, not from the selfish hope of the one, nor from the selfish fear of the other, but from the love of Himself alone." The Lord, who knoweth our frame, neither burns paradise nor quenches hell; knowing the weakness and poverty of our love, He mercifully plies us with fear, and entices us with hope. How graciously He answers Peter's poor commercial question, in Matt. xix. 27—29. He says at one time, "Fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell;" at another, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." So God thought for the Israelites of old: in the siege of Jericho He claimed all; yet might they fight, even there, with the thought of other cities in which the spoil should be entirely their own. 2. *God, who does not everywhere claim all, nevertheless claims the firstfruits.* This was so in warfare, and it was so in the matter of harvest. Men too often give God only the remnants of their life: they pour their strength out in business, and call Sunday a rest; they serve the world in youth and in the prime of life, and become religious in old age. God complains of this: He requires "the first of all the firstfruits of all things." **III. Our services and offerings to God are not to enrich Him, but to bring more wealth to ourselves.** Jericho was nothing to God: all its riches were nothing; and He who abhors human sacrifices, and has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, could have no delight in this shedding of blood. 1. *God does not command our offerings to meet any sense of want in Himself.* He cannot but be independent of all that we can bring. He who created us, and all that we have, cannot suffer need where our service fails. 2. *That which we can give, or be, or do for God, is commanded because it will help us.* The giving of money for the poor, or for religious work, is but the Divine way of cultivating our compassion, our sympathy, and our sincerity. Our deeds and our

worship are required not merely for the honour of God and the help of our fellows, but for the exercise of our spiritual faculties. As without exercise our limbs and our physical powers would fail and die, so it is with our faith, and compassion, and love. Think of the heritage of unselfishness, and of loving God so as to cost us something. If we are giving nothing and doing nothing for the Saviour, we are robbing no one so much as ourselves. The fraudulent railway passenger may say to himself, "I have travelled all those miles, and paid nothing." He forgets how much he has paid out of his self-respect and his integrity; he little thinks that he has been spending a vast amount of his manhood, and of his moral life. That man had better have opened a vein and given blood for his fare; he has cheated a railway company at the cost of draining away the life of his soul. The people who try to get to heaven by the process of avoiding all collections, and all forms of work, seem to reckon on having a very inexpensive journey: they may get to heaven; let us hope so; but they forget how very little of themselves will be left to enter in when they arrive. The man who goes on for forty years spending *himself* in order to save his belongings, may, when he dies, leave a great substance behind him; he will carry very little with him; so little, it may be, that the angels will not find enough *of him* left to take home at all. No man can withhold that which he ought to give, or do, for Christ, without being fined very heavily in his soul's life. **IV. God's claim on men is for a reasonable measure of devotedness in them, or for the utter devoting of them.** 1. *Those who love God are not taxed unreasonably.* God only asks Jericho for winning all Canaan; He does but ask of us a "reasonable service." 2. *Those who love not God enough to devote themselves to Him, are ever tending to the time when they must be devoted by Him.* The end of idolatry is to be made *cherem*. It matters not whether our idols are rude as those of the ancient Canaanites, or take more modern forms. It makes no difference whether we bear *the name* of the Lord's people, or men call us worldly (cf. Deut. xiii. 6—18). Even in the New Testament, the end of not being the Saviour's disciples indeed is to be made *cherem*: "If *any man* love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema when the Lord cometh."

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verse 17.** (I.) THE MEMORY OF THE LORD.

**I. The Lord's remembrance of man's sin.** This command to slaughter the Canaanites was not given in order that room might be made for the Israelites. God's eye looked back over the eight or nine centuries in which these children of Canaan had been strewing the short path of their national history with many and aggravated sins. They had been heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, therefore was it that God said, "The city shall be devoted." Many years later the Divine voice is heard saying to the ten tribes, "They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before My face." 1. *God remembers sin in all its forms, and not merely conventional sin.* Men agree to call certain trangressions sinful, to the exclusion of others; God deals with all sins alike. He has no favouritism in iniquity. 2. *God remembers, nevertheless, the different degrees of sin.* Some men are "sinners before the Lord exceedingly," as were the Sodomites, and God remembers the excessive forms which sin has taken. Men like Jeroboam and Ahab are singled out for prominence in wickedness. 3. *God remembers sin till it is forgiven, and not till then does He say, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."* The only Lethe of forgetfulness for the guilt of men is "the fountain open for sin and uncleanness" by Jesus Christ. Till sin is washed away there, God will remember it and men must. 4. *God remembers no man's sins in vain.* Moses dies on Nebo because God has not forgotten; and, notwithstanding the lapse of four hundred years, God says to Saul, "I remember that which Amalek did to Israel. . . .

Now go and smite Amalek" (cf. 1 Sam. xv. 2, 3). **II. The Lord's remembrance of His own promises.** In this slaughter at Jericho, Joshua is seen acting, not alone, but working together with God for the salvation of Rahab. In the covenant made with this woman: 1. *The fulfilment is equal to the promise.* In point of value the one is as the other. 2. *It is a fulfilment in detail:* "She and all that are with her." 3. *The fulfilment has regard to the conditions which were made*—"all that are with her *in the house*" (cf. chap. ii. 19). **III. The Lord's remembrance of human faith and service.** No one believes in the Lord ever so little, and then has to find that his trust is disregarded. Rahab in Jericho, the Syrophenician woman in the borders of Tyre and Sidon, or the thief upon the cross, it matters not which; none is too lowly, too vile, or too much a stranger to the covenants of promise, to believe in vain. Even the feeble faith of the woman who stole through the crowd to touch the hem of the Saviour's garment could not be kept secret: she too had to see that faith could not be hidden. God sees the smallest act of faith, let it come whence it may. So does God see the smallest act of service done for His people. Not only did Joshua know that Rahab "hid the messengers," but Jehovah knew it also, and kept the woman's house from falling. God would not suffer even the vain Nebuchadnezzar to serve against Tyrus, without noticing how "every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled," and then giving him Egypt as wages for himself and his army. Certainly we cannot give even the cup of cold water in His name, and for His people, and then lose our reward.

Verse 18. (II.) THE FORETHOUGHT OF THE LORD.

**I. Divine knowledge of the force of temptation.** The gold and the Babylonish garments might be solemnly devoted, but the Lord knew they would glitter temptingly notwithstanding. He who taught us to pray, Lead us not into temptation, well knows how much such prayer is needed by us each. **II. Divine acquaintance with human weakness.** "Keep yourselves from the devoted thing." The Lord accurately measures not only the pressure from without, but the power of resistance also. **III. Divine anticipations of human sin.** Men may say, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" but God loves us enough to speak plainly. He shews us that in His estimation our danger is real. If the warnings of Scripture were not inwardly felt to be so necessary, they might awaken our indignation; but the silence of even the infidels on this point is given in contribution to a general faith that the Bible is right. **IV. Divine solicitude for man's salvation.** 1. *God is solicitous for men individually.* He is concerned for each of us, lest we should make ourselves accursed. 2. *God is solicitous for men collectively.* He is concerned lest the camp of Israel should be made a curse. No man is so isolated as to be away from God's thought and care, and no host is so large as to outreach His love.

Verse 19. (III.) THE CLAIMS OF THE LORD.

**I. God literally asserts His right to claim all that which is His due.** At Jericho He demands everything. This is not usual; it was done to impress men with the vastness of God's rights, and to remind them of the grace of His ordinary dealings. **II. God symbolically asserts His claim to man's holiness in everything.** Gold would naturally be looked upon as one of the most carnal of possesions. It was to be shewn that even this could be set apart, and made to be "holiness unto the Lord" (cf. Zech. xiv. 20). **III. God graciously shews that His most exacting claims are made from a generous interest in men.** These things were to enrich the treasury of the Lord, that the house and service of the Lord might be more precious in the sight of men.

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 21—25.

### The Destruction of the Canaanites.

In slaying all the inhabitants of Jericho, with the exception of Rahab and her kindred, it cannot be too distinctly borne in mind that the Israelites were fulfilling the will and obeying the command of God. From Deut. xx. 10—18, it is clear that although mercy was to be shewn to all cities out of Canaan, the Israelites were to spare no one in the cities of the land itself. The command was, "Thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth:" the very sign of life was to be the token for death. In carrying out this terrible mission, the Israelites were not to consult any vindictive feelings of their own; they were to act throughout as servants of God. The subject of these verses is not human cruelty, but Divine severity. It is not for us to "justify the ways of God to men;" it would be equally wrong to turn from any of those acts on which God has laid emphasis, because they may not be pleasant to our feelings. God meant us to think on what He does: that is why His solemn works are recorded. In the light which six thousand years have shed on the name and character of God, all His acts should be received with unquestioning trust: His name written under any work whatever should be a sufficient guarantee of its rectitude. When the Judge bears such a character—a character even more Divine than His glorious name—it is good philosophy to argue, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Consider:

**I. The grounds for the destruction of these idolatrous people.** What is there about the case to assure us that this is no departure from the invariable justness and righteousness of God? 1. It should not be forgotten that *God has a right to the lives of all men.* That right is being continually asserted. In London alone, some one dies every eight minutes. God claims our little children who are too young to know what sin means, and our aged parents and friends also. Sometimes a dreadful accident sweeps away its scores, or even its hundreds; or it may be that a fearful pestilence takes, in a few weeks, many thousands to the grave. At the back of every death is the will of God. The ancient Persians believed in two gods, Ormudz and Ahriman; the former, the cause of light and good things, the latter, the cause of darkness and evil things. In the very teeth of that mistake Jehovah proclaims, through Isaiah, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." God claims to do the things which wound and break our hearts, as well as the things which heal them. The Saviour dares to stand prospectively by the slain martyrs of His Church, and in view of their shed blood and burned bodies to expound: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." God claims to stand by every death that occurs from disease or accident: He claims not less the right to employ the sword of man as an instrument for the overthrow of the wicked, and a means whereby He may call even His children home. If diseases and accidents may be the messengers of a just God, why not the sword also? Even men claim the right to destroy murderers. God claims the right to take life in single cases, and we bow in reverence to His demand. Joshua acts as God's instrument in slaying Achan; but no less does Elijah act as God's instrument in the destruction of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. The demand in one case is on a larger scale than the other, the principle is the same in both. It may be asked, Would not the effect of slaying all the Canaanites be morally injurious to the Israelites as their executioners? Could they possibly slay whole cities of men, women, and children, without becoming degraded and brutalised themselves? Probably the effect must be bad, if there were not some adequate reason. If there were a solemn need for this slaughter, in order that myriads might be rescued from the miserable degradations of idolatry, it might altogether

change and correct the influence on the minds of the executioners. But no theorizing on that point is necessary: as a matter of fact, the generation of men who did this dreadful work of slaughter were a great deal holier than their children. The lessons of this solemn judgment were written deeply on the hearts of the Israelites, and it was not till after they had passed away that the iniquity recorded in the book of Judges was committed. 2. *Apart from the Divine right to human life, the provocations of the Canaanites were very great.* (*a*) They were gross idolaters. For one thing, they worshipped Baal, in which worship the most degraded cruelties were practised. Little children were offered in sacrifice, and, in the time of Jehoshaphat, we find that the king of Moab offered for a burnt offering either his own eldest son or the son of the king of Edom. Another of the idolatries of the Canaanites was the worship of Ashtoreth, the Sidonian goddess of impurity, the lewd rites connected with which warrant the suggestion that the death of these children by the sword was merciful, compared with the life otherwise before them. (*b*) The Canaanites, who worshipped idols like these, must have known much of the true God. They were descendants of Noah, and with very few intervening generations. Ham, the father of Canaan, was one of the eight persons saved in the ark, and from his lips Canaan could not but have heard solemnly of God's awful judgment in the deluge. As has been pointed out, if Canaan lived as long as some of the children of Shem, his life and personal influence would have reached on through about half the period between the deluge and the overthrow of Jericho. The Canaanites had also received repeated warnings, which reached backward to the destruction of Sodom. All the pious traditions of Noah's godliness, and the subsequent warnings given because of the sinfulness of the Hamite branch of his descendants, had been alike despised. We have only to look at this case calmly to see how much reason there was for this sword of destruction. 3. *God's purpose was to remove this idolatry from the land.* We need not regard the whole of the inhabitants of the land as destroyed. They evidently had the alternative of flight, and God's fear is said to have been sent in advance of the Israelites to induce the idolaters to escape (cf. Exod. xxiii. 27—30). It is a matter of history that many are known thus to have fled to other lands. Those who chose to remain were to die, lest the Israelites should be corrupted. It might be asked, Might not the women and children have been spared? This, also, needs no consideration as a theory: some were spared, and the result was the gross idolatry of the Israelites themselves. The very history of the generations which followed, vindicates with painful sufficiency the necessity for this terrible command. 4. *While we mark here the severity of the Lord, we should also think on His longsuffering and His justice.* The covenant with Abraham, that his seed should inherit this land, was made more than four hundred and fifty years before, and God had then said, "Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age: but in the fourth generation thy seed shall come hither again: *for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.*" God waited for four centuries and a half; He would not consume these idolaters till the measure of their guilt made it imperative, nor would He allow Israel to take possession of the land so long as its original occupants were suffered to live. While we stand in awe before the severity of Jehovah, we are also compelled to behold that He is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." **II. The lessons which God, through this terrible judgment, would impress upon the contemporary and after world.** 1. *His unwavering determination to punish sin.* Longsuffering does but make wrath seem more awful: it shews that there was no vindictiveness in the Divine anger, but it lays terrible stress on its deliberateness. God "will by no means clear the guilty." Our sin must be borne personally, or be confessed by faith, and put away in Jesus. 2. *God's peculiar hatred of the sin of idolatry.* This deliberately proposes other gods, and He alone will be worshipped. Israel was to be punished for this just as severely as Canaan (cf. Deut. xiii. 6—16). This also was in mercy. There can only be One God for eternity; idolatry could

not but lead to everlasting spiritual ruin. 3. *Emphatic assertion was to be given to the fact that Divine anger is not fictitious.* Even good men, and some of these especially, have ever been wont to lean to the side of Divine love, so as to lose sight of the realness of Divine wrath. The need for these terrible records is proclaimed by nothing more earnestly than by the readiness of men to blot out, or interpret feebly, the sternest words of Scripture. 4. *We are to learn the importance of taking heed to occasional warnings.* The overthrow of the cities of the plain, and of the Egyptians, the wonders of the Red Sea and the wilderness, and the dividing of the Jordan, are preliminary to the destruction of a nation. 5. *God would teach the world, through all time, the awful meaning of His own silence.* It is not enough that we do not often behold the judgments of the Lord; the only place for safety is to stand where we can hear Him speak in love. These four hundred and fifty years were, notwithstanding some warnings, years of comparative calm. It would be only too easy for the Canaanites not to hear much of the voice of the Lord in judgments as far back as Sodom, and as far off as Egypt. But the silence of God was only such stillness as often precedes the storm. Ought not some to interpret prosperity and calm in the same way now? It has been written for our admonition, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verse 21.** "Every living thing in Jericho—man, woman, child, cattle—must die." Our folly would think this merciless; but there can be no mercy in injustice, and nothing but injustice in not fulfilling the charge of God.

"The death of malefactors, the condemnation of wicked men, seem harsh to us; but we must learn of God that there is a punishing mercy. Cursed be that mercy that opposes the God of mercy." [*Bp. Hall.*]

"The destruction of these Canaanite cities followed upon an immediate *Divine direction* (Exod. xvii. 14; Deut. vii. 2; xx. 16; 1 Sam. xv. 3); at another time the Israelites *vow* the same (Numb. xxi. 2). Again, in other cases, the devotement, in its inward direction and in its outward, takes place in consequence of *appointments of the law* (Lev. xx. 2; Deut. xiii. 16 ff.). By this a limit was set to all caprice; for the holiness of Israel, in rigid separation from everything of a heathen nature, and from every abomination of idolatry (Exod. xxiii. 32; Deut. xx. 18), was to be the only ground of the ban. Otherwise every murderer might with hypocritical mien have appealed to such a devotement of his neighbour. He who seized upon anything for himself that had been devoted paid the penalty with his life (Josh. vi. 18; Deut. xiii. 17; Josh. vii. 11 ff.)." [*Lange.*]

Verses 22, 23. THE DELIVERANCE OF RAHAB AND HER KINDRED.

**I. The sacredness of representative acts is as great as that of personal acts.** Joshua made the promise of the spies as binding as if it were his own act, and the Lord had regard to it no less than Joshua; for Rahab's house, though built upon or against the wall, stood safely after the wall had fallen. Representative acts are common all through society, and practically society often holds them to be imperatively binding. "No man liveth to himself." We are always committing other people to responsibilities by our deeds, even though we do not act officially on their behalf. Thus, too, we suffer in the sin of Adam, and are saved in the obedience of Christ. **II. The hope which comes from faith in God is as certainly salvation to the very sinful as to those who are outwardly righteous.** "By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that believed not." Having acknowledged in heart and by her deeds that the God of Israel was the only God, her safety

was in Him whom she trusted, and not in her past life. This woman, who was a sinner, was as safe in Jericho, though God Himself fought against it, as righteous Daniel in the lions' den. God loves all men; and when they accept Him by faith, it is He who is their Saviour, not their character. A young woman in Scotland left her home, and became a companion of the street-girls of Glasgow. Her mother sought her far and wide, but in vain. At last she caused her picture to be hung in various places of public resort in the city, which her daughter might be likely to frequent. Many gave that picture a passing glance. One lingered by it, and could not break away. It was the same dear face that looked down upon her in her childhood. Her mother had not forgotten her, nor cast off her sinning child, or she would never have sent her portrait to hang pleading with the wandering one from that wall. The very lips seemed to open, and to whisper, "Come home: I forgive you, and I love you still." So thought the poor penitent, and bursting into tears she hastened back once more to the home and the life in which mother and daughter could again be one. So God here seems to pourtray His own heart for the Rahabites of all time. He, too, is saying, through this pardoned woman of Jericho, "Come home: *I* forgive you, and love you still." Those who hear His voice and do His bidding, are as safe in His forgiveness as any other of His children. **III. The salvation of the soul comprises the salvation of everything else that is necessary, so long as it is necessary.** Both the book of Joshua and the Epistle to the Hebrews lead us to hope that Rahab was spiritually as well as temporally saved. That being so, her very house stands so long as it is necessary to shield her. The Lord throws down the rest of the wall, but not this part. Presently, when Rahab is delivered, the house may be burned in common with the other houses of the city. If we love God, all that we have is safe so long as it is wanted to assist in shielding us. When this is no longer the case, we need not mourn over our burnt dwelling-places, out of which the owner has been so graciously delivered. We might often sing over our saved selves, where we foolishly weep over our destroyed or removed belongings. **IV. The saved member of any one family should mean, at least often, a saved household.** Rahab and "*all that she had*" were delivered. It seems very dreadful to think of one member of a large family loving Christ, and living with them for years on earth, and yet at last going to heaven alone. It seems as though there could be neither love nor humanity in the creature who was delivered; or hardly a promise in the Bible, and only a God who gave no heed to prayer. **V. Those whom the Lord saves are not only to know deliverance from outward danger and death, they are to seek an inner and actual life.** These ceremonially unclean ones were to tarry without the camp till they had been purified. Proselytes were thus taught to feel that none of the old heathenism must be brought in to defile the children of the Lord, and they themselves must be separated from their former lives ere they could dwell before the Ark of the Divine Presence. Those who only come *to* the cross, must never expect to reach the crown. We need not only justification, but sanctification also. Nothing that defileth entereth in before God above. **VI. The salvation of the Lord has not only forgiveness of sin, but forgetfulness of it also.** Salmon, an ancestor of David, afterwards married Rahab. God thus graciously suffered her name to have a place in the genealogy of the Saviour; in addition to which, honourable mention is made by the Holy Spirit of her faith. It is as though Divine mercy would not only save the worst, but also hold before them hope of the highest honours. David did not speak vainly when he said, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us."

"It troubleth me not to conceive how, the rest of the wall falling flat, Rahab's house, built thereon, should stand upright; seeing Divine power, which miraculously gave the rule,

might accordingly make the exception." [*Fuller.*]

"Judgment and mercy shewn by the devotement of Jericho on the one hand, and on the other by the deliverance of Rahab.

"The rescue of Rahab considered in reference (1) to her character; (2) to the conscientiousness of Joshua, who would have the word which had been given kept; (3) to the future of the kingdom of God. Rahab the heathen woman is received into Israel, that through Israel the heathen also might be saved." [*Lange.*]

Verse 24. God would have us blot out even the traces of past iniquity. Sin is the abominable thing which the Lord hateth; where He exposes it, it is but that He may hide it for ever. Calvary reveals human sin only "to cast it into the depths of the sea" for ever. The Scriptures continually represent God as "covering sin," "blotting it out," or as "casting it behind His back."

God takes of the gifts which men have obtained, not because He has need of them, but because they have need to render Him honour, and to acknowledge that by His strength all has been won. That which God takes as His own, He still leaves for the help of His servants.

Verse 25. "I. God's promises are as certain as if they had already been fulfilled and gone into effect. II. God thinks also of compassion when He is most angry, for in the midst of wrath He is gracious. III. What God curses no man must bless, and what God blesses let no man curse." [*Cramer.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 26, 27.

### The Ruins of Jericho.

Reasons have already been given for the conclusion that Joshua's curse was pronounced against the man who should rebuild the city of Jericho on its original site, rather than against him who should re-enclose any newly built city with a wall. The very nature and object of the curse (cf. Deut. xiii. 16) are so entirely lost sight of by the latter conjecture, that this alone seems sufficient to render the opinion untenable. The place could not be called "a heap for ever," and thus stand as a memorial of Divine reprobation, merely because it lacked a wall. Strabo's allusion to similar curses pronounced in connection with the rebuilding of Carthage, Troy, and Sidene, is well known. In the case of Jericho, the curse was doubtless intended to keep the memorial of desolation before the eyes of coming generations. The ruins of the city would go on speaking vividly for ages, while a new city on the old site would obliterate the traces, and thus also the memory of this judgment of God.

I. **The ruined city a permanent memorial of God's hatred of idolatry.** There would be "sermons in stones," which the Israelites could hardly fail to read. God made the vision of His anger so plain upon the tables of these dismantled walls, that he who read might well run from the desolating influences and issues of idolatry. II. **The ruined city a lasting monument of miraculous help from heaven.** The Israelites would have other conflicts, in the future. Their future soldiers might come and see these walls *as God had left them*, and thus learn, that no enemies were strong enough, and no fortifications sufficiently solid, to resist the people whose helper was the Lord. The ruins would themselves take up the Divine word to Joshua, and continually preach, "Be strong and of a good courage." III. **The ruined city a constant appeal to Israel not to trust in an arm of flesh.** Jericho was a stronghold of the land, and a key to its possession. The old inhabitants could not stand with the fortress. The Israelites, with the Lord on their side, could take the city without lifting a single weapon against its walls. God meant His children to learn here how to sing, in all future

emergencies, the song of after years, "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." The generations to come were to see that they were never to trust in their own strength, and never to doubt the sufficient power of the Lord.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 26. THE FAITHFUL WORD.

About five hundred and thirty years after this curse was pronounced, a Bethelite named Hiel rebuilt this city, and suffered the exact penalty here predicted. It cannot be doubted that Hiel knew of Joshua's curse, knew that the city had been made *cherem*, and that, according to the law of Moses, it was to remain a heap for ever. Hiel would probably be as well acquainted with the curse as the writer of the history in the book of Kings. The very tone and manner in which the transgression is mentioned, seem also to indicate that this Bethelite knew that he was doing that which was forbidden. This record in Joshua, taken in connection with 1 Kings xvi. 34, suggests the following thoughts:—

I. **The easy path to unbelief of God.** The law itself might have assured Hiel that the curse was no mere utterance of Joshua's vindictive or excited feelings, but the mind and will of Jehovah. Assuming that the man knew of the curse, it is impossible to think that he believed it would come true. No father would have thus recklessly sacrificed his children. It is interesting, and should be instructive, to place ourselves mentally in the position of this Bethelite, and endeavour to ascertain by what process of reasoning he might be led to conclude that the curse would not take effect. 1. *Hiel might have thought that time had rendered the curse null and void.* Nearly five centuries and a half had rolled away since the fall of the ancient city; and it would be easy to hope, and presently get to feel, that the curse must have lost all its vitality during that long period. It is not difficult for men to persuade themselves that the threatenings of the Bible are very old, and to treat them as correspondingly weak. Men read of sin's penalty on Eli, on David, on Gehazi, on Ananias and Sapphira, and see that sin was punished; and they are told that God still is angry with the wicked. Then they remember that the Scriptures are not merely five hundred, but some eighteen hundred, years old; and forthwith they persuade themselves that time must have rusted away the edge from the sword of Divine threatenings. So Hiel might have thought, but, for all that, Abiram dies, and Segub also. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." 2. *Hiel might have reasoned, It is unlike the mercy of God to deal with me thus severely, even if this be a trespass.* Think of this man as sitting down to study the character of God: he would find mercy in Egypt, mercy in the wilderness, and mercy in the after-history of Canaan; and might presently conclude, It is altogether unlike God to punish my innocent children, even though my act might be guilty in His sight. Nevertheless, this man's children died. Life is everywhere vicarious, and God seems to have chosen this way to teach very emphatically that no man can sin without doing wrong to his fellows, and especially to his own children. Meanwhile we are left to see that our reasoning on Divine mercy never alters facts. 3. *Hiel might have said, I can see no reason for this strange command.* He might have thought it of little consequence in heaven whether he should build on a hundred acres lying towards his right hand, or on a hundred other acres lying on his left. It is not enough that we can call God's commandments strange: this is no sufficient reason for disobedience, or for unbelief. The ordinances of the Old and New Testaments may not be after the pattern of human fancy; they were given, nevertheless, for faithful observance. The cross is strange, and salvation through faith not less so, but if God be gracious enough to save us, it ill becomes us to cavil at the method. 4. *Hiel might have persuaded himself, This curse, after*

*all, may be merely a tradition; or it may be the curse of Joshua, and not the utterance of God.* Hiel ought to have known the law of Moses; but probably the neglect of God, common at this period, was accompanied by neglect of God's word. The man, if he much wished to build the city, might not find it difficult to treat the reported history as a tradition, or to consider the curse as the outcome of Joshua's excitement in the hour of victory. Men may treat the Scriptures as uninspired, calling this Gospel the book of a man named John, and another a history by a Jew named Mat hew, and the Epistles so many diffe ent letters by various writers; but when men have succeeded in taking all thoughts of Divine inspiration out of their creed, the inspiration of the Scriptures remains exactly as it was before. The promises are as precious as ever, and the threatenings as terrible. 5. *Most likely, however, Hiel built Jericho without troubling himself to think upon the curse with any earnest consideration whatever.* While he probably knew of the history, and had most likely heard of the curse, and possibly loved his children, he might proceed in a sort of careless hope that no harm would follow. More men are lost by careless unbelief than by deliberate disbelief. Where intelligent and honest scepticism slays its tens, carelessness destroys its millions. II. The absolute and unfailing truthfulness of God's words. Not one jot or tittle of this curse passed away. Abiram and Segub both died, the one at the laying of the foundation, the other at the setting up of the gates of the city. History shews an unbroken fulfilment of the Scriptures. It cannot be denied that much learning and enmity have for many years been arrayed against the Bible: it is something to say that no serious attempt has ever been made by infidels to prove it guilty of broken promises. III. The bad influences of unholy associations. It was *in the days of Ahab* that Hiel built Jericho, and the man himself was a Bethelite, In the city where Jeroboam had set up his calf, making the place a metropolis of idolatry; and during the reign of Ahab, "who did more to provoke the God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him;" there and then did Hiel build Jericho. This single sentence of history is one of God's many and everlasting monuments, erected in solemn protest against our association with wicked men; and from north, south, east, and west there looks out from the grim column this inscription, "Stand not in the way of sinners." IV. The power of unbelief, when it is once seriously entertained. When Abiram died, it might have been thought that Hiel would have desisted; the curse was seen to be effective: yet this miserable man appears to have gone on building, losing, as some think, other children while the work was proceeding, and seeing his youngest child expire when he had set up the gates of the city. What must have been his feelings while disobedience and death were thus working together? We do not know; this we know, the early death, or deaths, did not prevent the continuation of the work. It is hard to win men from carelessness; it is still harder to rescue them from cultivated unbelief.

"The imprecation upon Jericho; (1) a well-deserved sentence; hence (2) fulfilled as a prophetic word, when Hiel again built the city.

"Rather bless than curse, because we are Christians. Men not to be cursed, but only sin." [*Lange.*]

The curse on Jericho, though fulfilled on Hiel and his children, seems to have been absolutely and definitely removed in the time of Elisha, and by that prophet, about twenty-two years after the city was rebuilt (cf. 2 Kings ii. 19—22). The school of the prophets at Jericho (cf. 2 Kings ii. 5) may not have been in the Jericho that Hiel built, but in the city which we have supposed to have been built on an adjacent site, and assigned by Joshua to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 21). If this were so, there was no recognition by God, or by godly men, of the city which Hiel built on the original site, *until after the curse was removed by Divine direction.* After the curse was thus removed, the city became

again famous, and was conspicuous as the scene of several of our Lord's miraculous works. Taken in this light, the history suggests the following important subject:—

THE CURSE OF SIN AND ITS DIVINE REMOVAL.

**I. The occasion of sin's curse.** 1. *The curse of sin ever comes by man.* It is not arbitrary. God does not pronounce it on men because He has any pleasure in human pain and death. He swears by His own existence that this is not the case: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." So far from that, the Scriptures represent God as "grieved" on account of human sin and woe. Jesus Christ, who is the image of God, weeps at the grave of Lazarus, and over the coming desolation of Jerusalem. As we have been told, God is

> "Not in blessedness supernal,
> Sitting easy on a throne,
> Dealing sorrow out to others,
> With no sorrow of His own."

Rather let us remember that "In all our afflictions He is afflicted." 2. *The curse of sin is only pronounced after plain warnings.* It was so in Eden: God said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," before He spake the curse which followed the fall. It was so with these Canaanites, who had been warned solemnly and often. 3. *The curse of sin is, after all, full of mercy.* Sin could have no severer curse than to remain uncursed. Not only of necessity, but also of love, "sin worketh death." Death is within sin, as fruit is within the plant: that being so, Divine Love itself could do nothing more gentle, and nothing more kind, than to threaten punishment, and sometimes to inflict it from without. **II. The fulfilment of sin's curse** (cf. 1 Kings xvi. 34). This fulfilment is: 1. *Sometimes long delayed.* Hiel's punishment was five hundred and thirty years after Joshua's execration. 2. *Exceeding bitter.* Hiel's punishment seems more painful than if he had himself died. 3. *Falls on men not only directly, but representatively.* This, in the case of Hiel's children, was only symbolical of the usual and essential consequence of sin: "By one man sin entered into the world, and so death passed upon all men." If the children of this Bethelite died in infancy, we who believe that the infants of both dispensations are saved, can think of no greater mercy to them. The chastisement is on the father, who wronged himself, and, in an earthly sense, wronged them also; while the children are taken from the evil to come to a Father who wipes all tears from the eyes of all who dwell with Him. 4. *Faithful to the Divine word.* Hiel's punishment tells how not one jot or one tittle of what God says passes away until all is fulfilled. **III. The removal of sin's curse** (cf. 2 Kings ii. 19—22). The people who lived in the city which Hiel rebuilt seem to have suffered severely till God annulled the curse through Elisha. When God removes the curse of sin, He makes it as though no curse had ever been. He takes it away entirely. He forgets that it has ever been: "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." The Saviour throughout His ministry treats this city as though it had never known the curse. Here Jesus healed blind Bartimæus and his fellow-sufferer; there Zacchæus was told of Him who had come to seek and to save that which was lost, and heard his Lord say to him personally, "This day is salvation come to thine house." Not least, it was on an incident occurring on the way down to Jericho that our Lord founded the parable of the Good Samaritan. Thus graciously does God take away the curse of sin, and enable His servants to say, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Although quite unsuitable for homiletical purposes, the reader is referred to the article on "Barrenness" in *Calmet's Dictionary*, for an exposition of the passage in 2 Kings ii. 19—22; and also to the remarks of Josephus, *Wars*, iv. 8. 3. It will be noticed that

Josephus plainly distinguishes between "*the old city*, which Joshua took the first of all the cities of the land," and an adjacent Jericho, thus supporting the remarks previously made on this verse.

Verse 27. When the Lord is with His servants, (1) Their methods of service will appear singular to the world (verses 9—16); (2) Their triumphs will be manifest, notwithstanding all obstacles (verse 20); (3) Their obedience will be complete, even where difficult (verse 21); (4) Their mercy and integrity will be conspicuous in the midst of indignation (verses 22, 23); (5) Their consecration will be thorough in the presence of temptation (verse 22); (6) Their fame will eventually be as apparent as their faithfulness (verse 27). They will say with Paul, "Thanks be to God who leads me on from place to place in the train of His triumph, to celebrate the victory over the enemies of Christ; and by me sends forth the knowledge of Him, a steam of fragrant incense throughout the world. For Christ's is the fragrance which I offer up to God, whether among those in the way of salvation (as with Rahab), or among those in the way of perdition (as with the Canaanites); but to these it is an odour of death, to those of life." [*Conybeare's Paraphrase*, 2 Cor. ii. 14—16.]

## CHAPTER VII.

### *TROUBLE IN THE LORD'S CAMP.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Committed a trespass**] *Lit.*, "deceived a deceit." The meaning of the verb is to cover, as with a garment, thence to act deceitfully or treacherously. The sin of this single member of Israel is put as the transgression of the whole body. **Achan**] Called, in 1 Chron. ii. 7, Achar, the troubler of Israel. "Josephus also calls him Ἄχαρος for the same reason: the Vat. Cod. of the LXX. reads Ἀχαρ, the Alex. Ἀχάν" (Keil). **Son of Zabdi**] Zabdi, in 1 Chron. ii. 6, is given as Zimri, which latter form is thought to be an error of transcription. **2. Ai**] The same as Hai in Gen. xii. 8; xiii. 3, usually mentioned with Bethel. A small population returned to Ai from the captivity (Ez. ii. 28; Neh. vii. 32). In Neh. xi. 31, it is called Aija; and in Isa. x. 28, Aiath; while in Josh. xviii. 23 it is apparently the same place which is called Avim. **Bethaven**] The situation is uncertain. From this verse, it cannot, as some have thought, have been "another name for Bethel." Kitto thinks that in Hosea x. 5, Bethaven, "*the house of emptiness*," is put in derison for Bethel, "*the house of God*." **3. They are but few**] The number is given in chap. viii. 25, as twelve thousand. Judging by the small force sent against the city, the spies seem to have been mistaken in their estimate of the inhabitants. **5. Unto Shebarim**] "Probably stone quarries; it is evidently a proper name, as the Vulgate, Arabic, and most commentators agree, belonging to some locality between Ai and Jericho" (Keil). "Or, by translation, *to the broken places, i.e.*, to the steep broken sides of the Mutyah" (Crosby). **6. Rent his clothes . . . put dust upon their heads**] Both are ancient and common signs of mourning. They were practised among the Greeks and Romans, as well as among the Jews. With Joshua and the elders they were indicative of humiliation before God. **11. Have also stolen and dissembled**, etc.] To steal devoted things was solemnly sinful; every moment of hiding was a moment in which the guilt of theft was perpetuated and repeated in the conscience, in addition to which all Israel was being deceived and wronged; but the sin mentioned last, as though that were the greatest sin of all, was that of putting the devoted things "even among their own stuff," and thus shewing a determination to appropriate to private uses what was under the awful ban of God. **14. Brought according to your tribes**] *Heb.*, "be brought near," probably near to the Ark—near to the Divine Presence. Jehovah Himself would solemnly discover the offender. **The tribe which the Lord taketh**, etc.] This is the process of election by lot, and was frequently pursued, sometimes for widely different purposes than that of discovering the guilty (cf. 1 Sam. x. 20—22, xiv. 40—43; 1 Chron. xxiv. 5; Acts i. 26). The land of Canaan was divided in this manner among the tribes, and Jonah was discovered similarly, when he fled to Tarshish. **21. A goodly Babylonish garment**] *Lit.* "A cloak of Shinar," Shinar being the ancient name for the land of Babylon (Gen. x. 10). These garments have the reputation of having been highly wrought works of art. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, lib. viii., c. 48, says of them, "Colores diversos picturæ vestium intexere Babylon maxime celebravit et nomen imposuit." Josephus (*Ant.* v. 1. 10), says that the robe hidden by Achan was "a royal garment woven entirely of gold." **A wedge of gold**] *Marg.*, "a tongue" of gold. "What we commonly call an *ingot* of gold, is from a corruption of the word *lingot*, signifying a little tongue" (Clarke). "The value of the

silver, reckoned at 5s. per oz., would be nearly £28; and the ingot of gold would, at £4 per oz., be worth rather more than £90. An estimate of this kind must however be very uncertain, because we are unacquainted with the value which precious metals bore in the time of Joshua" (Kitto). 23. **Laid them out before the Lord**] *Marg.* = poured them out. They were thus poured out before Jehovah, in token that they had been made *cherem*, and belonged unto Him. 24. All that he had] *In ordinary matters, touching the national welfare*, the law provided that the children should not "be put to death for the fathers" (Deut. xxiv. 16), but this can hardly be used as an argument to prove that the family of Achan could not have been slain. (*a*) God might well reserve to Himself a right with which human discrimination and mercy were not to be trusted. (*b*) The awful solemnity with which the ban of devotement was regarded places it in an exceptional position. (*c*) This was a wrong deliberately done to God, as well as to the nation, and thus had features which might take it out of ordinary law. From verses 15, 25, with chap. xxii. 20, it seems that all the family of Achan were put to death. They may have been privy to Achan's sin, but this is not stated. Nothing is more solemn and emphatic throughout the whole chapter than the representative character given to the entire transaction. Even the camp of Israel was counted to be devoted till the iniquity was purged from out of their midst, and the thirty-six men who were slain in battle were as much made *cherem* as Achan himself. 26. **The valley of Achor**] This was doubtless so called from Achan's sin and punishment. Is it not also probable that the man took his name from his sin, and thus is literally known by his deeds? It seems unlikely that Achan would have borne such a name before his transgression, nor would the coincidence, had he been known all his life as "the troubler," be less singular. Instead of playing on the man's original name, in verse 25, does not Joshua bitterly and graphically so describe the act, that the term of description henceforth becomes the appellation by which the man is known in Israel, and thus also the name under which the historian *refers back* to so much of his life as is noticed? From Isa. lxv. 10 and Hosea ii. 15, it is evident that this solemn judgment made a deep impression, and took a lasting hold of the national mind.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1—5.

### The First Repulse.

**I. The separation which comes through sin.** "The anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel." Jehovah, who till now had been in alliance with them, "was turned to be their enemy." Their sins had separated between them and their God. The separating power of sin is one of its chief and most disastrous features. Sin is disintegrating; where holiness tends to join together in the blessedness of a beautiful unity, sin rends, and divides, and isolates, and thus desolates all through God's fair world. Sin is that ingredient from the devil's laboratory, which, thrown into the cup of creation's happiness, precipitates all that which otherwise would hold men and things together in the solution of a perpetual joy. It disturbs at once the unity, the beauty, and the peace of a world. 1. *Sin separates between men, irrespective of character.* It rends society, and revolutionises kingdoms; it breaks up families, divides churches, brings to an end partnerships in business, discharges the servant from his master, and has no more regard for unity in a palace than in a cottage. 2. *Sin separates between good men and bad.* It is a kind of perpetual judgment, through which, already, the sheep are being set on the right hand and the goats on the left. The sinful man withdraws himself from the righteous by preference, and the righteous from the sinful for protection, lest, standing in the way of sinners, he should become as one of them. Each, being let go, joins his "own company." 3. *Much more must sin separate between God and the wicked.* The polar regions cannot be reconciled to the tropics; the night cannot make the same hours a common home, and dwell together within them in amity with the day; spotless purity cannot be at one with defilement; much less can He who is the source of all warmth and light and love and goodness and truth have fellowship with the powers of darkness and evil. **II. The blindness which comes through sin.** God was not with the spies to enlighten and guide them, and therefore they were deceived (verse 3). In the next battle the strength of the people and place is very differently estimated. Instead of sending three thousand, Joshua selects at least thirty thousand men, five thousand of whom are detached to form an ambush on the west side of the city, while he him-

self appears to lead the remainder into the midst of the valley. While the former defeat would induce extra precautions, God had evidently suffered the judgment of both Joshua and the spies to become obscured when about to make this first attack on Ai. No such mistake was made in the matter of Jericho, either by the spies whom Rahab sheltered, or by any of the leaders of Israel. This is but an incidental illustration of an ever-recurring fact: sin is ever leaving men in obscurity, or actually deadening their perceptive powers. 1. *God still refuses to grant His light to such as choose to walk in the darkness of sin.* Those only does He guide with His eye, who have learned to say, "Our eyes are up unto Thee." 2. *Sin, in itself, works blindness.* They who do God's will shall know of His doctrine, and also of His ways. III. The weakness which comes through sin. The conflict at Jericho is an exposition of the words of Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me;" the conflict at Ai is an exposition of the utterance of the Lord Himself, "Without Me ye can do nothing." We learn in one battle that nothing is too hard for the Lord; in the other, that little is sufficiently easy for men. When God departed from the Israelites, that clause entered most naturally into the history, "They fled before the men of Ai." IV. The wide-spread suffering which comes through sin. "The men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men," and presently Achan and his family fall by the hands of their own brethren. The entire camp of Israel was made to suffer by reason of Achan's transgression. 1. *Sin brings loss and ruin.* All its gains have presently to be returned. 2. *Sin produces fear.* This is not only so among those who know not God, but equally so among God's people. They have but to transgress, and their hearts, also, "melt and become as water." 3. *Sin works shame.* The Israelites are humbled before their enemies, Joshua is humbled before his brethren, Achan's family have the shame of knowing that their deadliest foe is of their own household, and Achan himself is humbled in the deepest shame of all. This thief has to feel that he is bankrupt for his pains; this father, that he is childless by his own folly; this soldier, that he has brought defeat on his country; this Israelite, that his name must do worse than perish out from among his people—that he must henceforth be known as "the troubler" of his nation. 4. *Sin, let it work what it may previously, has its ultimate issues in nothing less than death.* "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." It ends thus with Achan and his family, thus with the thirty-six men who were slain, thus with myriads more; and but for Him who redeems souls from the power of the grave, it would have this for its ultimate issue in every member of the human race.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 1.—Corporate Responsibility. Achan sinned, and it is said, The children of Israel committed a trespass; for some time, no man out of Achan's household knew of his wickedness, yet it is written, The anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel. The act of this one man brings penal consequences on all the host, and Jehovah is said to have regarded the sin of the one as the transgression of all. However difficult it may be to satisfactorily define and illustrate the principle on which accountability of this kind rests, there can be no doubt of its almost universal acceptance by men. It is easy to clamour against it theologically, and to demand a philosophical explanation of its basis and working; but no man should rail against religious people in general because some religious people fail to enlighten him, lest he lay himself open to the charge of blaming a whole community because of the offence of some, and thus shew that his own sociology has the same dogma as the theology which he so readily vilifies in others. The explanation of the difficulty must not be sought in any arbitrary dogma imposed on men from without, but in that inherent and essential oneness which every one practically believes to pertain to every form of organic unity. It is just because it is impossible

for it to be otherwise, that it becomes foolish to inveigh against this principle. Let a body be made up of limbs or individuals, let it be held together by joints that are physical, by interests that are pecuniary, or by ties that are social, responsibility cannot be disbursed between its particular joints or ties so as to fall singly on the culpable member, but must be attached to the body as a whole. In practical life, men find absolutely no alternative from this law. It can hardly be other than weak to stigmatise as an arbitrary dogma that which all men find to be inherent and unavoidable. Because it so pertains to bodies, as such, it may be better to term it corporate than representative accountability. It will be sufficient, here, to indicate its wide-spread adoption by men for the purposes of daily life.

**I. Corporate responsibility is adopted in the intercourse of nations.** It is recognised between civilised nations. Let one of our ambassadors abroad offer an insult to the government to which he is accredited, and that government would interpret it as the insult of England, reparation for which would be counted due from our country. If violence were committed by the vessel of a foreign nation to a vessel, or to any person on board a vessel, sailing under the English flag, England would hold herself to have suffered that violence, and would look for apology and acknowledgment, not from the officers or crew of the offending vessel, but from the government from which they came. In the Alabama case, America held herself to have suffered loss by England, and did not concern herself with the firm which built the vessel; nor could this country, without some intervention, have suffered any harm to have been done to members of that firm, even though they had been found travelling in America prior to the settlement of the claims; for, just as offending children must be dealt with by strangers through their parents, so must offending subjects be dealt with through their governments. Nor are these principles in any measure the outcome of an overwrought civilization; they are of equal force among barbarians, and assert themselves with the same emphasis in the intercourse of savages. Every missionary and inoffensive European, who has been slain by natives in the South Sea Islands, and elsewhere, because of the wicked wrongs perpetrated by Europeans who have preceded them, furnishes an instance in point. Failing to reach those actually guilty, the savages have sought to avenge themselves by punishing men of the same community. Let a man in one tribe of North American Indians have offered in past years insult and injury to the member of another tribe, and the fierce war whoop would have proclaimed that in creeds savage as well as in creeds civilised there stood for an article of faith that ineradicable dogma of the universal conscience—The sin of a member is the offence of the body. It is not *the sin* of the body, excepting indirectly, unless the body condone it in the member, or refuse to make reparation to those who are injured. Indirectly, the body may also have moral participation in the guilt; it may be a remote party to *the sin*, through not having done its duty in training the member, through not having exercised sufficient care in selecting that member for the service under which he was tempted to sin, or through not having restrained him in some stage prior to the commission of the sin. Yet, although there may be little moral participation by the body when a member of it sins, the body must be, and is universally held to be, responsible for the consequences of the wrong done. It is perfectly in harmony with the world's own practice that, when Achan sins, God should be angry with Israel. **II. Corporate responsibility is admitted in family and social life.** If the servant of a master, or firm, or company drive recklessly, and cause an accident, the employers of that servant are held by law to be responsible. Here the liability *is pecuniary*, though there might still be a measure of moral guilt, such as would arise from employing the servant without taking reasonable care to ascertain his efficiency, before employing him in a service which might prove dangerous or injurious to others. If however a child grow up a thief, or is presently

executed for murder, society holds all the family to be disgraced. The penalty exacted from the father and mother of the murderer is far more than pecuniary; nor does this arise merely from the supposed neglect of such parents in training the child who ultimately committed murder, for the very children of such a murderer would also be held by society to be disgraced, and they would feel that disgrace themselves, whether society were lenient to them or harsh. If a man were to join for a single hour a party of ten burglars, and one of the burglars during that hour were to commit murder, each man would be held in law liable to capital punishment, not excepting the man who became merely for the hour a member of the nefarious body. **III. Corporate responsibility is the foundation of many exhortations and reproofs which are addressed to the Church of Christ.** Every appeal made to Christians not to disgrace the Church, or to bring shame on the name of Jesus, and every reproof to any who have thus sinned, is based on the universal conviction that the sin of a member is rightly held to disgrace the entire community. Even the sacred name of the Saviour is held not to be exempt from these inexorable and far-reaching penalties. Peter and Judas, in the days of the ministry, could bring dishonour upon Him; and we, who live now, are exhorted not to become of them who "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." **IV. Corporate responsibility is made the basis of deliverance in the case of every one who is spiritually saved.** "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. Through the first head of the race, sin and death came upon all, and the former of these penalties is no less severe than the latter: through Him who became by His own grace and righteousness the second head of the race, holiness and eternal life are given for a heritage to every member of His body. Only those are lost who detach themselves from Him by sin and unbelief. Coming into the race as its second head, it is not merely those who accept Him that are saved, but all who do not reject Him, that is, little children. The first head carried its penalty of death to all belonging to the body; the second head carries, no less, to all who do not reject Him the gift of life. In each case, the body follows its head, and for those who choose to renounce Christ, after they have entered into this natural life under His headship, there remains nothing but the old head and the old doom.

THE ANGER OF GOD.

"God's *anger* is not an ebullition of blind passion, but a holy displeasure against the unrighteousness of men. When this unrighteousness is removed, God's anger ceases, as verse 26 shews. All which has been injuriously said concerning the blood-thirsty and wrathful God of the Old Testament rests on a failure to apprehend this holy displeasure of God against the unrighteousness of men. That brings upon them indeed judgment and penalty, but never goes so far as to shut up His compassion. . . . Eternal justice, which belongs as a constitutive element to the nature of God, without which we cannot conceive of any government at all of the world, is constantly limited by His love. But, conversely, His love towards men is not a blind love, but rather a truly paternal affection which leaves no fault, no transgression of His commands, unreproved. Both justice and love co-exist in God, and are mutually blended in Him with an interpenetration of the most intimate, highest, absolute kind. Hence the jurists may say: *Fiat justitia pereat mundus!* God never has and never can." [*Lange.*]

"There is a community amongst men that are of the same society, every one being a part of the body, so that what evil he does, he does not as one alone by himself, but as a part of the body whereof he is a member." [*Augustine.*]

God not only knows every transgressor's name, but each transgressor's history. The fathers, the tribe, the training, and all the surroundings of a sinner are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do

**Verses 2—4.—Man's Unconsciousness of God's Absence.**

**I. Here are men working together for God, but not with God.** God had withdrawn Himself from the Israelites. Even if still present in the camp, the Lord had ceased to work with any of the people. 1. *To be doing God's work is not a sufficient guarantee of having God's help.* The people were as much engaged in doing the work of the Lord when they attacked Ai as when they destroyed Jericho; yet the Lord, who was with them in the one case, refused to accompany them in the other. We see (*a*) Joshua sending out spies, while he himself is not moved to do this by God; (*b*) the spies searching in God's cause, but without God's guidance; (*c*) the three thousand Israelites fighting God's battle, but none of them having God's assistance. 2. *God's presence with us in the past is no sufficient guarantee of His continual presence.* The marvellous passage of the Jordan, and the magnificent triumph at Jericho, were but things of yesterday, and indisputably God was with them there; yet neither the one nor the other, nor both, prevented God's absence and Israel's defeat at Ai. We need manifest grace for each day of our lives. Yesterday's mercies may have been large, and should be long and gladly borne in mind, but we need also the assurance of to-day that God is with us. Yet let no one think that these temporary withdrawings of God furnish an argument for the doctrine that He withdraws from His people perpetually. The truth or falsity of that must be settled elsewhere, not here. The history at Ai distinctly shews that God does but forsake Israel for a time, that He may again come to them in even more than the closeness of the former union. The very design of the absence is to provide for Jehovah's future presence. 3. *The godliness of any part of a body of the Lord's people is no sufficient guarantee of the Lord's fellowship and co-operation with that body.* Joshua, and the rest of the leaders, and the general multitude of the people probably loved God more than ever. Their hearts were warm with gratitude for the wonderful help of the past, and filled with hope in the Lord as to the future. We can think of no time in all their previous history when the people were likely to be so close in union and ardent fellowship with God as after the fall of Jericho. Yet because one man, and perhaps his family, had broken covenant with God, God had turned against all Israel. One offender in a church may prevent the Divine blessing from resting on that church. When a church altogether walks in holiness, it may confidently expect abundant blessing from on high; but the piety of any part of that church, although it be a large part, may be insufficient to secure God's manifest presence. The sin of one member may still be held to corrupt the entire body. **II. Here are men working together for God, and utterly unconscious of God's departure from their midst.** One of the most solemn aspects of the narrative is its revelation of the complete ignorance of all the people that the Lord was no longer with them. *Joshua was ignorant of this.* Apparently he sent out the spies, and formed his plans for the overthrow of Ai, with as much confidence as when he proceeded to lay siege to the City of Palm Trees, albeit on that occasion he took his instructions from the Prince of the host of the Lord in person. *The spies were ignorant of the Lord's departure.* Comparing their conduct with that of the spies who went to search out Jericho, they were as prompt to undertake the work, as ready in forming an opinion, and perhaps even more confident in the judgment to which they came. There is an assurance, a definiteness, and a precision about their recommendation to Joshua, given in the third verse, which has nothing to correspond with it in the recorded utterance of the spies who returned from a similar mission to Jericho (cf. chap. ii. 23, 24). *The army, also, seems to have been ignorant of this terrible change that had come over the camp.* The people who waited in their tents remained quietly, and the three thousand who went up to the battle seem to have gone confidently. No one seems to have had the least suspicion that Jehovah had with-

drawn from Israel. It is, perhaps, even more possible for us to suffer the withdrawal of the Lord's presence, and to remain for some time ignorant of our loss. Just as the Ark still remained in the camp of Israel, and Eleazar the high priest, with his assistants, still ministered in the service of the tabernacle, thus enabling the people to think that all things continued as before; so may we, as we retain our Bibles, and continue our religious worship and service, satisfy ourselves with the outward signs of religion, while God Himself is absent from us. There is no more solemn feature in the sad history of Samson than that brief chronicle of a similar ignorance, in which we read, "He awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." **III. Here are men working together for God, and learning through defeat and shame and death that God is not with them.** This ignorance is, and can be, only for a time. Samson was not long in discovering his loss. Saul, also, learned to cry, "God is departed from me." The fathers of these very Israelites would not believe Moses when he said, "Go not up, for the Lord is not among you," but they speedily learned how true it was, when the Amalekites and Canaanites came down from the hill, "and smote them, and discomfited them even unto Hormah." So, in their very first battle after the Lord's departure, the Israelites learned at Ai what they had failed to discover when encamped around the Ark. Yet some only learned this as they fell slain in the battle. Happy is he who so walks and talks with God as to promptly feel the loss of Divine fellowship when God is no longer present; on the other hand, terrible is the lot of him who only makes the discovery as he knows death to be drawing nigh, and then, like Saul, learns his loss too late.

Verse 5.—The Changelessness of God and the Mutability of Men.

**I. The apparent vicissitudes of God's changelessness.** God here appears to have altered His mind, and to have turned completely round in His relation to the Israelites. From being Israel's friend, "He turned to be their enemy, and fought against them." What the swellings of Jordan could not do, the tides of wicked feeling in Achan's single heart did but too effectually,—they turned aside the power of Jehovah, and made it work in another direction. The majestic strength which the walls of Jericho were unable to resist for a moment, this single man both resisted and reapplied. The history reveals Achan as the morally weakest man of all the host, and yet as the man who reverses omnipotence, making it to work in the direction of seeming enmity instead of in the way of manifest love. So great is the power of a traitor friend beyond the might of an open foe, and so infinitely beyond the force of physical things is the strength of things which are moral.

Thus it is that we are abruptly brought face to face with what has been called the seeming vicissitudes of God's changelessness. In plainer words, God's changeless way with men is made up of apparent and well-regulated changes. But these changes are only apparent; they are not real and actual. In this instance, before Ai, although it may sound paradoxical, if God had not changed, He would have changed, and by changing He preserved His glorious immutability. If God had continued to fight for Israel, He would have been helping men who had gone over to the side of sin; He would have been found in alliance with men who had done an act of rebellion against holiness and against Himself. In a word, it was Israel who had turned, representatively, against God, hence the apparent turning of God against Israel. Life is full of these seeming changes on the part of God. They are all to be brought to this one explanation: God alters His outward relation to men, that He may sacredly preserve His own immutable way in the interests of truth and righteousness and mercy. When God seems to have turned against us, it is because we have changed our ground. If He followed us, He would change also. He keeps on in the way of mercy

and truth, saying, as only He in all the universe can say, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." Take an illustration. The ship alters its course, and the compass changes at once; it traverses just as many points over the deck of the ship as the ship itself turns away from its previous bearings. And thus it is that the compass remains true to itself, and continues to be known as

"That trembling vassal of the Pole,
The feeling Compass, Navigation's soul."

It is exactly because the compass moves in its relation to the veering ship that it continues to be so abiding in its relation to the pole. Thus it is that when Israel alters its course, and actually turns back on its former path, it must needs come into collision with an undeviating God. Thus, too, in another and more pleasant instance, when Nineveh repents and turns to the way of the Lord, the Lord is said to "repent of the evil that He had said He would do unto Nineveh." The outward relation is but altered that God's eternal way of love and goodness may stand firm and abiding. 1. *When God is against us, it is because we have got where we are against Him.* If we find Him "hedging up our way with thorns," it is because we are in the wilderness. As Bunyan puts it, if we are in the hands of Despair, it is because we are out of the King's highway. 2. *Where God is seemingly against us, He is really for us.* It would have been a curse on Achan, indeed, if all things had continued prosperous; not less would it have cursed Achan's family and all Israel. The people would have learned that they could sin with impunity, and yet conquer triumphantly as ever. It was Mercy that pleaded for defeat, and for judgment on Achan; and just because God's love was so deep and true, the warning became so solemn and bitter. **II. The mutability of human life.** 1. *The entire prospects of a man's life may be suddenly altered by himself.* While God remains thus true, the reversal of our prosperity will be as sudden as our departures from Him. This may not always be manifest. God does not always reveal His changed attitude in our altered temporal life. For other reasons than those appearing in this battle before Ai, He sometimes lets "the wicked flourish." Yet just as abruptly as men turn aside into ways of sin, will God ever turn aside their real prosperity. 2. *The position and prospects of a man's life may be as suddenly changed by others.* Achan brings defeat on all Israel. So long as we participate in the profits of fellowship with men, we must also suffer the penalties. Every corporate body, with an identity of interest, is a kind of firm; the members associate and unite in view of certain advantages, and they cannot do this without a joint responsibility common to them all. Thus may an individual bring shame and loss on a host. **III. The unswerving influence of man's sin.** 1. *Sin ever tends towards defeat.* It may not seem to do this, but it at once begins to work in that direction, and in that only. 2. *Defeat which comes through sin invariably works fear.* All defeat does not bring fear. Sometimes it stimulates. But when men have to trace failure to their transgressions against God, fear is the certain result. In such a case, it matters not whether they are Canaanites or Israelites, unbelievers or Christians, the same record serves for the history of all, "Wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water."

"At Jericho, Jehovah had shewn Himself to be merciful. At Ai, He magnified Himself as the just One, who will not allow His laws to be broken with impunity." [*Hävernick.*]

"It is not good to contemn an impotent enemy. In the second battle the Israelites are beaten. It was not the fewness of their assailants that overthrew them, but the sin that lay lurking at home. If all the host of Israel had set upon this poor village of Ai, they had been equally discomfited: the wedge of Achan did more fight against them than all the swords of the Canaanites. The victories of God go not by strength, but by innocence. [*Bp. Hall.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 6—9.

### Defeated and Praying.

Defeat is very painful when it comes to us as a first experience. The child, the business man, the soldier, each is troubled to bear his first humiliation of being beaten. When Adam was overcome for the first time, he hid himself. When Robert Hall failed in his early efforts to preach Christ, he cried, "If this does not humble me, the devil will have me." When Joshua was beaten back before the men of Ai, he, and the elders of Israel with him, fell before the Ark in humiliation and prayer. **I. We see the Lord's servant acknowledging defeat.** Joshua felt that he had been sent on Jehovah's mission, that he had the prestige of former help from on high and of previous victories, and that he had gone up to this fresh conflict in the strength of Divine promises which hitherto had never failed him. **1.** *Think of the connection between the defeat of the godly and the confession of such defeat before God.* The first Napoleon is reported to have said of our soldiers, "The worst of those English fellows is, they never know when they are beaten." That may be a good thing to say of bravery in earthly service and conflicts, but it must not be said of the soldiers of Christ. When the Lord is gone over against them, and defeat succeeds separation from Him, they can have no more fatal trait of character than that proud stubbornness which refuses to own that the battle has resulted in their overthrow. (*a*) All actual defeat, to a Christian man, is from God. God permits it, or occasions it. This is so in business life; in family life; in Christian life; in Christian work. (*b*) Defeat being always from God, should ever be carried to God. Joshua falls *before the Ark.* Low at their Father's feet; that is the place for His beaten children. They will learn the reason of defeat as they lie there. Thus, when the beaten disciples at the foot of the mount of transfiguration fail to heal the boy with the dumb spirit, and confess their failure before the Saviour, they soon learn the cause of their humiliation. They had only to ask, "Why could not we cast him out?" and the answer came at once, "Because of your unbelief." **2.** *Think of the relation of defeat to humility.* Joshua rent his clothes, and fell on his face, and put dust on his head. Thus he, and the elders of Israel, fasted and humbled themselves all the rest of the day until the evening. They took the way common to the time and country in which to express their humiliation. These usual forms were merely the vehicle in which they came with humbled hearts to God. We need not take the same forms. It does not matter what the vehicle is, if it only be sufficient to carry our hearts in true humility to the mercy-seat. But all defeat in the Lord's war should work lowliness of mind. It is for this that each defeat is sent. Grosart has noticed that there was "a kind of ascending scale" in our Lord's temptations in the desert. This seems to have been the case. The temptations both in physical position and moral intensity seem to lie successively on higher ground. For the first temptation, "Jesus was *led up* of the spirit into the wilderness;" the second temptation was higher still,—it was "on a pinnacle of the temple;" the third was highest of all,—it was "up into an exceeding high mountain." And with this idea of physical elevation there is a concurrent gradation of intensity in the temptations themselves. The first temptation is to work a miracle on the stones to satisfy *bodily hunger;* the second is to make a sensuous demonstration in order to secure *speedy success to His work;* the third is to take the short road *to universal power* by meeting sin and the devil half-way. Our temptations, also, intensify as we go up. Let us not refuse to take the lowly position to which God ever invites us by our defeats. He puts us low on the ground at His feet, just because in our present state we could not bear the greater ordeal of the higher position to which we should be brought by further success. When God brings us down, we should learn to lie down; that is the safest place for the present, and the quickest way up as concerning the future. **3.** *Think of the effect of defeat upon Joshua's faith.* When defeat came, Joshua was utterly surprised. His faith in God was so simple,

and yet so strong, that he had no room for a lost battle. The chief feeling, perhaps, which impresses us on reading his prayer, is his utter astonishment at the repulse. We think our faith great when we believe in a victory that comes. "My husband is to be converted to-day," said an American Christian woman to her minister. "How do you know that?" asked he. And then the believing wife told how she had been praying, and how, although her husband shewed no sign of repentance, the assurance had taken firm hold of her heart that he would that day be brought to Christ. Her minister testifies that the man was converted on that selfsame day, and, in an exposition of some verses in the previous chapter, narrates the incident, as it would probably strike most modern believers, as an instance of great faith. Joshua's faith had room for nothing but victories. We are surprised at one success; he was overwhelmed with shame and confusion when he was not triumphant everywhere. How this trust of the men who knew not a verse of our Gospels, and who had no Cross in which to glory, should put our small faith to shame! We ought to live so in the faith of Him who died for us, that defeat should make us stand aghast with astonishment, and then fall low in the dust with humiliation. It is said that a few years ago a young engineer was being examined for graduation, when his examiner proposed the following question: "Suppose you have a steam pump constructed for a ship, under your own supervision, and know that everything is in perfect working order, yet, when you throw out the hose, it will not draw. What should you think?" "I should think, sir, there must be a defect somewhere." "But such a conclusion is not admissible; for the supposition is that everything is perfect, and yet that the pump will not work." "Then, sir," replied the student, "I should look over the side to see if the river had run dry." We profess to believe in the omnipotence of the Spirit, and that the Spirit has been poured out from on high in a baptism of holy power. When our children are not given to us in Christ, when no spiritual victories follow our spiritual efforts and conflicts, is it not time to look for the cause of failure? Everything on God's part must be perfect, but may it not be that we have let go our union with Him? Surely it must be so, if in all these things we are not more than conquerors through Him that loved us. **II. We see the Lord's servant praying that defeat may be turned into victory.** 1. *Prayer may have much infirmity, and yet be heard and answered by God.* (*a*) Joshua's petition shews a spirit akin to murmuring and reproach. It seems to partake too much of the tone of some of the previous rebellions, as we hear it said, "Wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us?" (*b*) Joshua loses sight of God's past leading of the people, or else he questions the wisdom of Divine guidance. He peevishly cries, "Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!" He speaks as though the past had been a mistake. (*c*) Joshua shews us the nearness of faith to unbelief. He whose former faith had been so great as to leave no place whatever for defeat, now shews a distrust which can hardly find room to hope for any future victory: "The Canaanites shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth." So poor, in some aspects, seems the spirit of Joshua's petition before God. Yet this prayer prevailed; if it did not bring an immediate reversal of defeat, it made the way clear for future victory. Our prayers may be moved by an imperfect spirit, and may be poured out in unseemly words; if, like Joshua, we have a heart earnest with holy longings, and desirous of God's honour and His people's welfare, they will not be poured out in vain. 2. *True prayer throws its principal stress on the glory of the Divine name.* "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?" Just as Moses had done before him, Joshua felt truly and deeply concerned for the Divine honour before the heathen nations. This is the true spirit of prayer, and one to which God ever has regard. The Saviour said repeatedly, before leaving His disciples, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you." Yet prayer is not merely the formal mention of the Divine name, for, if that were so, the Lord's prayer itself

would be imperfect. The suppliant who would prevail indeed, must come in that spirit which God loves, and which makes the Divine name the glorious name which it is; he must come, as the Saviour Himself loved to plead, having no will or wish that stands opposed to that Sovereign will which by prayer he seeks to move.

Verses 6—9.—Godly Sorrow.

I. The sorrow of the godly is deep and unfeigned. 1. *It is involuntary.* It is independent of any act of the will. It comes as suddenly as its cause, answering to the blow that smites as the echo answers to the call, or as the thunder responds to the lightning. Godly sorrow flows naturally and freely, not stiffly and artificially. True humiliation has no onion tears. 2. *It is continuous as the necessity.* It is not satisfied with a prescribed amount of tears and shame. Such sorrow has no thought of any intrinsic merit in humiliation. It has no regard to penance. It does not set itself a given lesson in grief, thinking that so much grief is equal to so much guilt. Joshua fell upon his face, not merely until eventide, but till the Lord said, "Get thee up." II. The sorrow of the godly is not so much the sorrow of selfishness as sorrow with God. Joshua has fears for Israel, and he is not free from the sense of the personal pain which will come to himself and the people through shame and loss. This is only human and natural. But Joshua's great grief is that the enemies of the Lord will find opportunity to blaspheme. He thinks it less that Israel's name shall be cut off from the earth than that the great name of Jehovah shall be dishonoured. The late F. W. Robertson has said on the subject of sorrow for sin: "God sees sin not in its consequences, but in itself: a thing infinitely evil, even if the consequences were happiness to the guilty, instead of misery. So sorrow according to God, is to see sin as God sees it. The grief of Peter was as bitter as that of Judas. He went out and wept bitterly; how bitterly none can tell but they who have learned to look on sin as God does. But in Peter's grief there was an element of hope; and that sprung precisely from this—that he saw God in it all. Despair of self did not lead to despair of God. This is the great peculiar feature of this sorrow: God is there, accordingly self is less prominent. It is not a microscopic self-examination, nor a mourning in which self is ever uppermost: *my* character gone; the greatness of *my* sin; the forfeiture of *my* salvation. The thought of God absorbs all that." Such is the hopeful feature in Joshua's sorrow for the defeat at Ai. Though he may suspect some wrong, he does not, at the time of this prayer, know how fully the defeat is owing to actual sin. Yet the grief of this godly man for himself and Israel is comparatively lost and absorbed in his concern for the honour of his Lord's name. So, if our sorrow be really holy, it will ever gather round the name and truth of God, rather than around our most sacred personal interests. III. The sorrow of the godly is sometimes impatient and unreasonable. Without, on the one hand, taking the seventh verse to be an "irreverent remonstrance," and without reading it, on the other, merely as the utterance of what the heathen would "infer from the event," it is almost impossible not to discern in the language something of the peevishness of pain,—something of that bitterness of impatience which is rather the sharp outcry of a wounded heart than a remonstrance with Jehovah. The words are more subjective than objective; we must read them rather as words escaping from the man, than as words addressed to God. Some men feel pain more keenly than others. Thus a finely wrought spirit has cried out the enquiry:—

> "Is it true, O Christ in heaven! that the highest suffer most?
> That the strongest wander farther, and more hopelessly are lost?
> That the mark of rank in nature is capacity for pain,
> And the anguish of the singer makes the sweetness of the strain?"

It is even so. As the author of "Ecce Deus" has told us, "Suffering is a question

of nature. The educated man suffers more than the uneducated man: the poet probably suffers more than the mathematician; the commanding officer suffers more in a defeat than a common soldier. The more life, the more suffering; the billows of sorrow being in proportion to the volume of our manhood. The storm may pass as fiercely over the shallow lake as over the Atlantic, but by its very volume the latter is more terribly shaken." It is this volume of manhood, this capacity for pain, this sensitiveness to shame and wounding, that, to superficial gazers, makes the very strong sometimes seem so very weak. The pain of the jelly-fish may be hardly perceptible, the agony of the lion is terrible. Moses and Daniel and Paul stand conspicuous above their contemporaries, not only in ability to work, but also in power to suffer. So Joshua, with his great nature, his fine feeling, and responsible position, is bowed down by this calamity to the very dust, the prostrate form of his body hardly serving to express his greater prostration of spirit. 1. *Those who have greatness enough to be Christians must not wonder if they suffer more than those who have not.* The man who is sensitive to sin, to the commandments of God, to the power of truth, to the pain of conscience, to the love of Christ, must not wonder if he suffers more than those, many of whom are morally "past feeling," and the remainder of whom are more or less advanced in this most terrible of all the forms of insensibility. Not only as from the lips of the Saviour, but as the very outcome of the Christian condition of the conscience, true disciples must expect to find it stated as their heritage in the way of life, "Through much tribulation ye must enter into the kingdom." 2. *Those who are great enough to be greatly Christian must expect to suffer conspicuously even among the suffering Church.* The greater tribulation of men like Moses, and Joshua, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Daniel, and Peter, and Paul, is no more an arbitrary regulation than it is an arbitrary regulation that the Church should suffer more than the world. Christ's word about the necessity of suffering is not to be read merely as the decree of a sovereign; though it be the assignment of His will, it is even more emphatically the heritage of life that is in Him; and the larger the measure of that life, the keener will be the sensitiveness to the suffering which, in this world of sin, is inflicted on every hand. IV. **God is very tolerant of such impatience as is merely the expression of His children's pain.** A child may call out sharply under the touch of the hand that tends him in some infirmity, but a mother never mistakes the cry of her child's distress for the utterance of dislike to herself, or for the expression of rebellion against her authority. Patients under the hand of the surgeon have been heard to heap words of insult and threatening on the man who was engaged in setting a broken limb, but no wise operator would interpret words like those as being more than the expression of pain. Thus God ever discerns between the outcry of a wounded heart and the irreverence of a rebellious spirit. Joshua may speak, not as it is becoming that he should speak, but in the hastiness of disappointment and the bitterness of pain; God has not so much as a word of rebuke for this; He simply proceeds to say, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?"

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verses 6, 7.—Man Praying and God Silent.**

**I. The ignorance of man in prayer.** The defeat before Ai seems to have been in the morning. During all the remainder of the day, Joshua and the elders of the people were bowing in humiliation and fasting and prayer before God. Joshua was ignorant of Achan's sin, ignorant of God's deep anger, ignorant of the fact that victory at Ai would have been one of the greatest evils that could have befallen Israel. Human prayers are ignorant from various causes. 1. *There is the ignorance that results from carelessness.* Men fail to study themselves, sin, the Bible, God. 2. *There is the ignorance consequent on our limited*

*capacities and our straitened powers of obtaining knowledge.* Joshua could not watch an army to see that none transgressed. It required infinite knowledge to mark the conduct of every man in the hour of battle and confusion. Only omniscience could see every man. Only omniscience, too, could see the evil of the sin which had been committed. 3. *Ignorance sometimes stands connected with the thing for which prayer is made.* Joshua wanted victory restored to Israel. He did not know, during these hours of prayer, how much richer Israel was to be made through defeat. 4. *Ignorance often has to do with the way in which prayer is to be answered.* God gave Joshua victory after all; but the way to victory lay through further shame and a yet profounder humiliation. Israel was to be discovered as guilty of breaking the covenant, and one family in Israel was to be utterly destroyed out of the camp. **II. The wisdom of God's silence.** We are not told of the way in which God generally communicated with Joshua, neither are we informed how long God usually kept His servant waiting ere He answered. Commonly Divine counsel seems to be given to Joshua at the time and place where it is needed. It might be expected that in a grave emergency like this God would have responded to His servant's cry at once. Yet the Lord kept silence, although for hour after hour Joshua lay pleading to be heard. Yet, now that we have the entire account before us, the wisdom of Divine silence is manifest. God's silence would gradually prepare the mind of Joshua (1) *To suspect that something was wrong in the camp;* (2) *To realise the severity of the Divine anger;* (3) *To acquiesce in, and presently execute, the solemn sentence against Achan;* (4) *To understand, when the people were again purified, that victory when in alliance with sin, would be the most ruinous defeat of all.* **III. Man's misinterpretation of God's silence.** The seventh, eighth, and ninth verses seem to be only uttered when the day of humiliation and prayer had well nigh closed. Perhaps the sixth verse is meant to epitomise the history of hours of patient pleading for light, and in that case the three verses which follow would tell the tale of the impatient outburst of Joshua's broken heart when he finds himself unheard. 1. *Failing to obtain God's answer in the present, men despondingly misinterpret God's mercy in the past.* "Wherefore hast Thou brought this people over Jordan?" One would have never expected to hear any question as to the mercy and love of God in the passage of the Jordan. Apparently Divine goodness was indisputably manifest there. In times of darkness men question God's greatest mercies, doubt their own richest experiences, blot out and re-write in hard terms the noblest parts of their personal history. 2. *Failing to obtain God's answer in the present, men unbelievingly doubt God as to the future.* Hast Thou brought us over Jordan "to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us"? Defeated and distressed minds see everything through the disorder and confusion of the present. With so many examples in the Scripture of the noblest servants of God who have proved themselves utterly unfit for calm judgment of their hope in the Lord during times of sorrow, we might well refuse to be led by personal feelings in the hours of our own distress. 3. *Failing to obtain God's answer in the present, men are tempted to think any part of their lives more profitable than that.* "Would to God we had been content," *etc.* In after days Joshua would come to look on those hours of weary agony in prayer as some of the most notable and useful in his life. They were a time of crisis, in which, amid intense suffering and doubt, this good man waited for the salvation of Israel. They were one of those times of trial in which so many who are but superficially pious begin to go eternally wrong. They were one of those judgment days of the Lord which even here on earth go to separate between the sheep and the goats. Happy was it for that generation of Israelites that, in this crisis of trial, they had a leader whose piety was deep enough to wait before God, and too deep to turn to anything else than to prayer for a solution of this mystery of darkness, and in order that

a way might again be found through which he and they should again walk forth into the light of the smile of God.

With those who are truly devout, outward forms are the suitable expression of inward feelings. God never has to say to such, "Rend your hearts, and not your garments."

The devout heart alone is qualified to pronounce on the religious ceremonial in which its own sense of woe, or want, or joy can best be told out to God.

So long as human hearts and experiences differ, and men are true to themselves, so long will the forms through which they tell out their life to each other and to God be various and unlike also.

Verse 8.—**I. The human weakness of the Lord's people.** They too can turn their backs (cf. Ps. lxxviii. 9, 10). **II. The Divine prerogative of the Lord's people.** They need not turn their backs. Let them but walk with God, and they have omnipotence on their side. It is their privilege alone to say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" **III. The pious shame of the Lord's people.** "O Lord, what shall I say? 1. *There are no logical words in which to account for a Christian's defeat.* If Omnipotence says, "Lo, I am with you alway," there is no making out of a reasonable case for the overthrow of a child of God. 2. *The only words in which to speak of such a defeat, are words of shame.* We can but say, "I confess that there are no words." 3. *The best place for words of shame, on account of such defeat, is low before God.*

Verse 9, first clause.—**I. The effect of faith and victory.** All the time Israel believed and prospered, the hearts of the Canaanites did melt and become as water. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." **II. The influence of fear and failure.** "They shall hear, and shall environ us round." Every increasing thing tends to increase, and every decreasing thing to decrease. The impetus of success. The retarding influence of failure. "Nothing succeeds like success." Doubting Christians, who morbidly encourage doubt, think far too little of the depressing effect of their ceaseless discourse about fear and failure.

"The heart of man can nowhere observe a just proportion. In prosperity it is too proud, in adversity too pusillanimous." [*Cramer.*]

In times of unusual prosperity we are apt to unconsciously trust our success rather than God from whom all success must come. Thus, Elijah was bold and undaunted when he had no victory upon which to lean. Then came the triumph on Carmel, in which the prophet heard the multitude with one voice confess Jehovah. Forthwith Elijah hoped for Israel; he seems to have trusted the prospect of a spiritual harvest rather than the God of the harvest. After that, it only needed Jezebel's threat to fill him with a despair which made him cry, "O Lord, take my life." So, after Jericho, Joshua finds it hard to endure Ai.

Verse 9, last clause.—THE GLORY OF GOD'S GREAT NAME.

**I. God's delight in His name is not in any measure akin to self-praise and vanity.** The Scriptures constantly bid us to seek the glory of God. God does not desire glory as men desire it. With men, the pursuit of glory is selfish and vain; God's way to glory is through self-sacrifice. **II. God's delight in His name is delight in those things which make His name glorious.** His name and Himself are alike The Good. He delights in helping the helpless, in comforting the wretched, in vindicating the cause of the oppressed, in sanctifying the sinful, in saving the lost. He hates sin, in the very attributes of His being, with deliberate and eternal enmity; He loves holiness and truth in the same infinite degree. His name, taken as such, is no mere centre around which His interest perpetually and eternally revolves; His name is Himself, and He is the everlasting embodiment of all that is lovely, and of all that makes His intelligent creatures happy and good. **III. God's care for the honour of His name is also a care for those who need that name for a refuge and a joy.** If God's name were to lose its glory, heaven would lose its

lustre, and the universe its brightness; angels would have no home, man no rallying centre, and devils no restraint: the universe would be as a huge solar system without its sun; confusion, and darkness, and ruin, and death would be everywhere. If but a stain were found on the character of God to-day, the power of that evil would uproot the cross, abolish the Church, blast every better human hope, banish the redeemed, make heaven into hell, and hell riotous in the fierce fury of a newfound and malignant joy. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." **IV. Where men are seen most concerned for the honour of the great name of God, God is seen most taking care of that name.** It is precisely where Joshua is found crying, "What wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?" that God is found taking such solemn measures to reassert His antipathy to sin. All His Divine sympathies for His people are crossed, the majestic tide of events which was flowing so fast to fulfil His covenant with Abraham is suddenly stayed, a temporary encouragement is even permitted to the idolatrous workers of iniquity, that God may have, and may be seen to have, no collusion or connection with sin. So it was where Moses feared for the Divine glory, that God was even then vindicating the honour of His name (cf. Ex. xxxii. 11—14; Numb. xiv. 11—24). Let us learn: 1. How impossible it is for God to favour him who persists in sin; 2. How abiding is the refuge of the righteous; 3. How encouraging is the hope of the penitent; 4. And that there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved, but the name of God as it stands revealed in Jesus Christ.

"Joshua's humble prayer before God. God withstands the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

"Joshua's grief for his people compared with the lamentation of Moses and Ezra.

"Joshua as an example of mourning before God.

"Comparison between Joshua's penitence and that of Ahab.

"Rending the garments a significant symbol of rending the heart (Joel ii. 13).

"How God hears prayer." [*Lange.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 10—15.

### God Dealing with Human Sin.

In this chapter we see God dealing (1) with sin, (2) with an individual sinner, (3) with a sinner's family, (4) with a sinner's possessions, (5) and with a community having a sinner for one of its members. This paragraph shews us the mind of Jehovah concerning sin and the forgiveness of sin.

I. Sin not only brings a need for the prayer of suffering and tears; but while sin is unforgiven it limits the influence of prayer. God says to Joshua, "Get thee up." The power of unforgiven sin in limiting the power of prayer is here very emphatically marked. 1. *The prayer of the unforgiven is not refused a hearing, or even an answer.* God comes to Joshua. True, He does not come till eventide; Joshua and the elders of the people have to lie all day ere He draws nigh to attend to this prayer of suffering; but God does come, and to a certain extent He answers this cry of the needy. So far this is very merciful; it is like God. If men really pray, He keeps not silent, even though prayer come up to His ear from the lips of the unforgiven. God, who answered not "by prophets nor by dreams," spake nevertheless through Samuel to unforgiven Saul in his agony; and had Saul truly repented, even though Gilboa might still have received its royal victim, the pains of death would have been soothed with the thought of Divine pardon. No man can truly pray and God not hear. The breath of real prayer is not a mere electric current which rings a bell and moves the hands on a dial in front of the throne and before the eyes of a God who sometimes refuses to

attend; it is a current of troubled desire in man which moves in the heart of God as a compassionate, wise, and holy sympathy. We may be sure that when we pray importunately from our heart, sooner or later God draws nigh to see if we are in a right mind to profit by help from on high. 2. *But the prayer of the unforgiven can only secure God's attention in respect to the sin which is not put away.* The Lord comes to Joshua, and virtually says, "Get thee up: all that I will hear thee upon is this matter of sin." He will speak on nothing else. He will consider nothing else than this matter of sin. Mark the holy irony of the question, "Wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" As if prayer were not God's own appointment! As if lowly humiliation were not His own ordained method of approach to the mercy-seat! As if Abraham and Moses and others had not been answered, till lowly prayer had become known, even through the Divine response, as a mighty power! But in this case there was this difference, Joshua and the elders of the people, in common with all Israel, were held to be guilty of Achan's sin—not personally guilty, yet corporately guilty. That is why this question is asked, and that is why Joshua is bidden to get up, and to desist from his particular pleading, while God speaks with him on this question of sin. (*a*) *Humiliation is nothing when it is not humiliation for the unforgiven sin.* In this sharply defined picture, God shews us that it is useless to humble ourselves for adversity, and leave out any unforgiven sin which may have had to do with the adversity. It is so in national fasts; in personal trials, *etc.* Rent garments, prostrate forms, dust and ashes and sackcloth, are nothing to God, if we take no account of sin. (*b*) *Grief is nothing, if it be not grief for the guilt.* A man may feel his heart broken at the consequences of sin, and cry out of that broken heart to God; and God will hear him on the question of the sin, but not on the question of consequences till the sin itself is put away. If a man lose a situation through ill-temper or idleness, squander a fortune by prodigality, incur physical disease through intemperance, it is useless to plead the sorrow till he have first communed with God in sincere repentance on the matter of the transgression. Joshua may mourn his thirty and six slain, and the shame and pain which have come through defeat: God thinks it in good time to consider these when the camp has been cleansed from its impurity. (*c*) *The plea of future consequences is nothing, if the unforgiven do not find the most disastrous consequence of all in the wrong done to God.* God says in effect, "Wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face to tell me of Amorites and Canaanites to be feared, of Israelites who turn their backs to the enemies, or of a national name to be cut off from the earth? Wherefore concernest thou thyself with the honour of My great name? What is that to thee, thou unforgiven leader of an unforgiven people? Get thee up." So may an unpardoned man plead for his future peace and honour, for his family, for the church with which he stands connected: God declines to consider these sorrows to come, just as much as sorrows that are, till sin be put away. The consequence which the guilty should mourn as most unbearable, is the wrong done to God,—the wrong done to His nature, His past mercies, His unfailing goodness and love. II. **Sin is not only limitation and weakness to urgent prayer; it is, in itself, full of injustice and wrong.** The eleventh verse contains six allegations; the first two dealing with the sin in its relation to God, and the remaining four describing the character of the transgression. Two of these four descriptions, the taking and the stealing, seem to be synonymous, unless the taking be intended to refer to the secret appropriation of the heart, and the stealing to the outward act of the hand. Probably, however, the verse should be read as a succession of cumulative utterances, rising to a climax in the natural rhetoric of strong emotion, rather than as containing that philosophically exact analysis of the sin, more suitable to calmness of heart and thought. Taking the terms of description as three, rather than four, we see that: 1. *Sin is theft.* And this description of the particular sin of Achan has far more general truth in it than some imagine. Sin is taking something from another. It is always that,

and never less than that, let the sin be what it may. The murderer takes life; the burglar and the pickpocket take goods; and the theft in transgressions of this kind is manifest. But the liar is also a thief; the drunkard, the vain man, the ambitious, the false-hearted, each deprives his fellows of valuable possessions. Each takes from the purity of the moral atmosphere which surrounds his neighbour, and thus takes away from his neighbour's means of maintaining a healthy tone of life. Each, moreover, robs his fellow of the good example which every living man owes to those about him. 2. *Sin is deceitful.* Achan stole not only the gold and the garment; but he robbed the Israelites of God's favour; he made the camp of Israel to become devoted, and then by hiding both the stolen goods and the knowledge of the curse brought upon his people, he suffered them to go ignorantly up to their defeat. Achan stole the devoted things from God; he stole from Israel God's smile and help, victory over the men of Ai, and thirty-six lives; and he dissembled about the theft even in the presence of the slain. Thus sin does yet other injury in the deception with which it is ever accompanied. It leads the innocent unsuspectingly into danger, and, it may be, to death. 3. *Sin is misappropriation for personal advantages.* "They have put it even among their own stuff." The sinful seek personal gain and pleasure at the expense of others. Like Achan, however, who presently has to restore all, and more than all that he had taken, no man ever sins without having to feel ultimately that transgression always costs more than it yields. **III. Sin is not merely a wrong in itself; it is a rejection and a breaking of God's covenant.** "They have also transgressed my covenant." The breaking of the covenant is put as an additional and distinct feature of the sin. If it be said that Achan made no personal covenant with Jehovah, it is enough to reply that the covenant made with the host was binding on him individually. He was a member of the community, and he had stayed with the people, and enjoyed with them the common privileges of the covenant for many years previously. Thus Achan had *voluntarily* become a party to the covenant. In addition to this, no man is at liberty to ignore any covenant of the Lord. For Jehovah to proffer Himself to man in anything, is for man to stand bound. 1. *The covenant made with men in Christ is binding on all men.* Hence, the Gospel leaves no man where it finds him. It is the "savour" of something to everybody,—"of death unto death, or of life unto life." Every man comes into life under this "New Covenant." It is because of this, and not because of some specific act of mercy lying outside of the plan of salvation, that children dying in infancy are saved. The child of a Hottentot, or a Maori, or a Greenlander, dying ere it comes to years of responsibility, is saved because of God's covenant with the human race. When Paul says, "As in Adam *all* die," he means everybody; there is no exception. Equally does the apostle mean everybody when he says, "Even so in Christ shall all be made alive;" there is no single exception in the case of the life, any more than in the case of the death. Every one comes into life under the covenant with the race made through Christ, and if nothing were done to forfeit that life, thus forensically secured in the Redeemer, every one would be saved. But no one comes into life regenerate. The judicial life is one thing, the principle of the new life is another. In Adam all have died, not only judicially, but morally, and hence it is written to all men, "Ye must be born again." Yet it is true that till every child becomes responsible for his acts he is under the covenant of life, and till actual sin be committed, he has the promise of life. Were it otherwise, we should be absolutely forced to accept the monstrous creed of elect babies and lost babies. There would be no logical alternative but the absurdly fanciful conclusion that all the babies who have died in their infancy, would, had they been spared, have grown up to become Christians; or that they came into the covenant of grace by the mere act of dying before a given day, after which they would have been personally responsible, when the act of dying would no longer have been efficacious. If all children who are saved, are saved by the work of Christ for the human race; and if all children

**are not in Christ by virtue of being members of that race**; then, either some children are lost, or they must come into Christ by the mere act of dying at a given time, or only such children as are elected to life ever die as children. The first of these alternatives is not only unlike God, but inhuman; the remaining two are simply frivolous. If this be so, then every child begins this life completely justified by the work of Christ; every child is under the covenant. 2. *Every adult living in sin is not merely a being who has not accepted the covenant, but a being who, having been under the covenant, has ignored and rejected it.* It is this that makes the position of each intelligent transgressor so unspeakably solemn. It is not that unbelieving men merely refuse to accept Christ; such, having begun life under the shelter of Christ's work, absolutely reject Christ. Like Achan, who had partaken of covenant privileges, they presently treat the covenant as of less concern than the things which tempt them to transgress. 3. *The most aggravated form of human sin now, is the rejection of the covenant made with them in Christ.* It is a rejection of God's love, of the Saviour's sacrifice, of the past mercy which shielded them as helpless children. **IV. Sin has not only these aggravated forms of guilt in itself, but weakness, and injury, and many other evil results in its train** (verse 12). 1. *Sin brings weakness.* God is not with sinners, and every transgression is so much loss of a man's own moral strength. 2. *Weakness brings defeat.* The weakness that comes through sin is not a mere sentiment of the pulpit; it is something more than ecclesiastical poetry. History, whether national, family, or individual, has many battle-fields of failure and flight and shame and loss, to expound the reality of the weakness. 3. *Such defeat may stand connected with death.* Not only before Ai are there thirty and six slain; many, yea countless, are the broken-hearted, and other dead, who have gone down to their graves unable to bear the defeat which has been wrought by some one's transgression. **V. Sin is not only at the time of transgression, but till the time of repentance.** "Neither will I be with you any more," *etc.* The heart repeats the guilt through every moment in which it refuses to repent. A state of unrepentance is not negative, but positive; the heart refuses to think repentance a present necessity. The heart thus virtually certifies the guilt afresh, and, in spirit, commits it over again. In this light, (1) *think of the importance of prompt repentance;* (2) *think of the aggravated guilt, and of the solemn position of an aged unbeliever.* **VI. The forgiveness of sin requires not only separation from the transgression, but some adequate acknowledgment of its guilt.** 1. *Forgiveness of sin requires separation from the sin.* "Sanctify yourselves." The formal sanctification of the people was meant to be the outward expression of a heartfelt antipathy to Achan's transgression. 2. *Forgiveness of sin requires an adequate protest against the evil of sin* "He shall be burnt," etc. Ere the Israelites were forgiven, they were to express in some suitable way their disavowal and detestation of the offence. This expression of feeling was imperatively necessary for the Israelites themselves. If a child sin against his father, a wise father will not recklessly forgive, but will, for his child's sake, require some expression of contrition and disavowal which shall be, so far as possible, commensurate with the magnitude of the offence. It is not because of any longing to honour the abstract principles of justice that a wise father would make such a demand; justice would furnish the ground for that demand; but it is the father's love to his child, his love to his other children, and his sense of duty towards society generally, which would make the demand imperative and the father inflexible. In a modified form, the same feelings would actuate a good governor or judge in dealing with criminals, and, allowing a sufficiency of power, a good and wise nation in dealing with the offence of some other nation. Justice is passive, and does but furnish the license of right to proceed; it is the sense of duty to others, or the feeling of love to them, which is active and urgent in its demand that the offender suitably express contrition. It was God's *love to Israel* that made Achan's prospect of

pardon so hopeless; the offence had been great, and nothing less than the life of the more immediate offenders would be understood by Israel, and therefore be taken by God, as a suitable and sufficient acknowledgment of the guilt. So it was God's love to men, and not His hunger for justice, that made the cross of Christ so absolutely imperative. Either man, the offender, or God who wished to pardon, must for the sake of the world at large, perhaps for the sake of the intelligent universe, suitably recognise the guilt of human sin. Man could only do this in his own ruin; to save him from that ruin, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This "power to forgive sins," without disordering the moral forces which influence sinners, is the most wonderful manifestation of power ever displayed even by God. Thus the narrative of the cross is greater than the record in the opening chapter of Genesis; the glory of Calvary transcends the majesty of creation.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 10.—The Relation of Prayer to Work.

**I. In times of new perplexity and distress, the natural order is first to pray, and then to work.** It was not till eventide that the Lord said, "Get thee up." Although it would have been useless to pray after that, God does not rebuke Joshua for praying before that. 1. *Prayer brings light upon the difficulty itself.* Without this humble and persevering petition, Joshua must apparently have remained ignorant of the sin which had been committed. 2. *Prayer secures the Lord's guidance.* The petition that brings God to our side cannot be useless. Jehovah guided His servant (*a*) to know that sin had been the cause of the defeat, (*b*) to understand fully the nature of the sin, (*c*) to the assurance that sin must be put away before He would again be with Israel, (*d*) to discover the sinner, (*e*) and to the way in which the Divine presence could once more be secured. When God begins to enlighten His people, He guides them, not merely to know the measure of their difficulty, but entirely through that difficulty. He gives the light of the law to reveal sin, the light of the cross to shew how sin can be put away, and the light of precious promises to assure us of His personal presence till the last enemy shall be destroyed. 3. *Prayer brings strength for work.* It was no light task which Joshua had to perform. For the first time in his capacity as leader, he was called on to inflict the judgment of death. The prayer, the words of the Lord, and the solemn process of discovering the offender, would prepare both Joshua and the people for this dreadful task. **II. In times of distress, work should never be willingly allowed to precede prayer.** Difficulty may overtake men in the midst of work, when there is little opportunity for prayer. It was so when Joshua first saw the beginning of the defeat at Ai. Excepting momentary supplication, there would have been little time for Joshua to think of anything but the battle, and the management of the retreat. But, in times of emergency, work should not precede prayer from choice. Had Joshua renewed the battle with a greater force, he would probably have sustained a fresh defeat. Defeat would have been added to defeat, and distress to distress. He who pursues work that has failed, when he should be asking help from the Lord, can only expect to add sorrow unto sorrow. **III. Work should never be neglected for prayer.** While Joshua merely prayed, (1) sin could not be put away, (2) God would not come to the help of the people, (3) and the Canaanites would exult in their recent victory.

"The question: 'Wherefore fallest thou thus upon thy face?' is one of reproof, implying that Joshua had no reason to doubt the faithfulness of the Lord, or to implore its continuance; since it was not to God, but to the sin of the people, that he must trace the calamity which had befallen Israel. The reproof does not of course apply to the mere fact of Joshua's turning to the

Lord and prostrating himself in prayer, nor even to the tone of complaint against the Lord observable in the words of his prayer, but to the disposition, which he manifested, to seek the cause of his misfortune in God and His superintendence, whereas it was to be found altogether in the transgression of the people." [*Keil.*]

Verse 11.—THE SINFULNESS OF SIN.

I. **The successive stages of sin.** "When Achan longed, he ought to have resisted; when he planned, he ought to have stopped before taking; when he had taken, he should have cast it away instead of stealing; when he had stolen, he should have freely confessed it; and when it was buried, he ought to have dug it up again." [*S. Schmidt.*] II. **The aggravated guilt of sin.** 1. *It was a transgression of righteousness.* "Israel hath sinned." 2. *It was a transgression of the law of gratitude.* God had graciously entered into covenant with them, under that covenant they had already received mercies for forty years, and recently these mercies had been wonderful beyond conception. Forgetful of all this, and in the very hour of a miraculous victory under the covenant, Achan ignored the covenant altogether. 3. *It was a transgression of God's word.* "Which I commanded them." 4. *It was the transgression of good faith.* Under the specific condition of not touching the spoil, the victory had been granted, and Achan had "even taken of the *cherem.*" 5. *It was a transgression of honesty and truth.* "They have stolen and dissembled also." 6. *It was a transgression of Achan's own conscience.* Had he not felt it wrong to put the devoted things "among his own stuff," he would not have hidden them. III. **The wide-reaching evil of sin.** God held that "Israel" had done this wickedness. Through each of the six charges contained in the verse, the sin is ascribed to all the people: "*They* have also transgressed," etc. IV. **The connection between sin and unbelief.** Achan had no real faith: 1. *In Divine omniscience.* Had he really believed that God saw him, he could not have taken of the spoil. 2. *In Divine punishment.* Had he been convinced that he would have been "devoted," he would have resisted the temptation. 3. *In the Divine word.* To disbelieve in the punishment was to disbelieve Him who had threatened to destroy. The man evidently believed concealment from his brethren a much more important matter than concealment from Jehovah. Thus does unbelief in God usually lie at the root of all transgression.

Verse 12.—THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNFORGIVEN GUILT.

I. To be without forgiveness is to be without God. II. To be without God is to be without strength (cf. John xv. 5). III. To be without strength is to be without courage. IV. To be without repentance for the sin which works results like these, is to be without hope.

"The oracle of God, which told Joshua that a great offence was committed, yet reveals not the person. It would have been as easy for God to have named the man as the crime." [*Bp. Hall.*]

Verses 13—15.—GETTING READY TO BE SANCTIFIED.

I. **Human preparation for putting away sin.** What Jehovah teaches Israel, we should learn as necessary for ourselves. There are no superfluities in the Divine teaching, and human hearts are as weak now as they were three thousand years ago. In order to be sanctified indeed, the Lord teaches us the following things: 1. *To get a deep consciousness of sin's existence and guilt.* "There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee." There will be no question of sin's presence in us if we wait long in the Divine presence. We are to feel that sin justly makes every one who entertains it worthy to be devoted. 2. *To maintain an unwavering conviction that sin works misery and ruin.* "Thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until," etc. He who suffers himself to entertain the smallest hope that sin can ultimately bring anything but loss and misery, is hindering his sanctification. If we would be

made holy, sin must be regarded in its results, as well as in its nature, as an unmixed evil. 3. *To undertake deliberate and specific acts tending to sanctification.* It is only the forms, and never the moral principles of the old dispensation, which are abolished in the N. T. We also need the help of a deliberate purpose to be sanctified, and of outward things in which we can manifestly act in that direction. Regular times for private examination, meditation, prayer, and the reading of the Scriptures, are helps which no man can dispense with for long without becoming irregular in holiness. For special times of departure, fasting and humiliation, in secresy before God, should not be despised. Most men are more in danger on the side of worldliness, than on the side of superstitious asceticism. **II. Divine help for putting away sin.** The Lord would discover the way in which sin entered into the camp, the person who had introduced it, and the place where the proofs of it lay hidden. This discovery: 1. *Supposes omniscience by its boldness.* The proposal was to single out one person from two or three millions. A charlatan, relying on effrontery in himself, and superstition in his victims, has sometimes ventured to assert his power to detect a thief from among half a dozen ignorant and credulous people, one of whom has been known to be guilty of stealing; and, owing to the timidity which accompanies transgression, he has occasionally succeeded. It would be a widely different thing for a man to gravely propose to unfailingly detect one thief from among all the inhabitants of London, and that by means of considering the people, in their absence, under some systematic division of the multitude into classes. It required God, calm in the consciousness of infinite discernment, to announce that He would, with invisible hand, unfailingly guide the lot past the myriad names of Israel to the name of him who was guilty of the crime. 2. *Is impartial in its spirit.* Prejudice had no place whatever in the enquiry. 3. *Is deliberate in its method.* God moves to judgment slowly, that the guilty may have opportunity to repent and confess. 4. *Is solemn in its steady progress.* Jacob, under no special accusation, felt the very presence of God to fill him with awe: surely when Achan watched the ever-narrowing and unerring procession of the lot, which pointed out successively his tribe and his family, he must have been ready to anticipate the last selection, and to cry out in an intenser fear than the patriarch, "How dreadful is this place!" 5. *Is certain and convincing in its result.* Probably no single person in the host had, any more than Joshua (verse 19), the smallest doubt that Achan was the offender. Then, what God so unerringly shews, and his brethren without exception believe, the guilty man unavoidably confesses. So bold, and fair, and solemn is the judgment of the Lord; so terrible, to the guilty, is its issue. **III. Characteristic features in the putting away of sin.** If we would be sanctified in heart, as well as outwardly, we must deal severely with that which offends (verse 15). 1. *No necessary sacrifice must be withheld.* Sin may call for extreme measures, but the Saviour said for our guidance, who live in this dispensation, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." 2. *No weak hesitation is to be suffered.* "In the morning ye shall be brought," etc., and after that each step is prompt and firm to the bitter end. 3. *No room for sympathy with transgression is to be left.* Achan, and all that he had, were to be destroyed. No opportunity was left to mourn with "the bereaved," and thus get gentler thoughts of the sin in fellowship with the sufferers. The transgressor and his family, who might have been privy to his guilt, were to be alike "stoned with stones, and burned with fire." He who would fight manfully against sin, must leave no way of retreat into the regions of transgression.

Verses 10—15.—**I. Prayer and humiliation are of no ultimate account without repentance.**

**II. Repentance avails nothing without sanctification.**

**III. Sanctification is impossible without abhorrence of sin really felt and unmistakably expressed.**

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 16—23.

### THE REVELATION OF PARTICULAR SINS.

Although God knew the actual offender as fully as He knew that transgression had been committed, He directed Joshua to proceed as if the criminal were altogether unsuspected. God would manifest the guilt in a manner which should bring conviction to every individual in the camp. It is a beautiful feature in Divine justice that the Lord never rests, as He might rest, in His own unerring assurance of right; He is concerned, also, to satisfy every feeling of enquiry and doubt in the minds of those whom He judges. The issues of the Judgment Day will represent not only the mind of Jesus Christ, the Judge; they will express the unwavering conviction of the lost, the undivided feeling of the redeemed, and the confident assent of the universe.

**I. The God-directed search for sin.** The enquiry was directed to the discovery of a specific act of sin, and to the detection of the individual transgressor. We see the Lord deliberately undertaking to expose some particular act of sin in some particular members of Israel. There is an immense difference between the moral effect of any general exposure of sin, and such revelation of specific and individual guilt as is undertaken here. Men think comparatively little of general acknowledgments of iniquity. Witness the general confessions of sin made in public services and prayer meetings. It would make confession a different thing indeed, if those who acknowledge that they are sinners, at the same time named their sins. The exposure of sin in this form concentrates and focuses the attention. The result in the two cases presents all the difference that there is between a dreamy theory, which all men admit, and a sharply defined and localized fact, at which everybody is alarmed. It is sin in a specific form, and attaching to an individual man, that God here undertakes to reveal. It may be asked, Why did Jehovah concern Himself to reveal actual sin in this form? Why did the Saviour repeatedly draw attention, openly, to particular transgressions among the Apostles? Why in the course of Divine providence, now, does God frequently bring to light instances of guilt in Christian men, which at once shock the feeling of the Church, and afford opportunity for the scorn of enemies? Would not society gain by the concealment of iniquity in instances like these? The late F. W. Robertson, speaking of the case of sin in the Corinthian Church, has thus dealt with the whole question: "There are two views of sin: in one, it is looked upon as a wrong; in the other, as producing loss—loss, for example, of character. In such cases, if character could be preserved before the world, grief would not come; but the paroxysms of misery fall upon our proud spirit when our guilt is made public. The most distinct instance we have of this is in the life of Saul. In the midst of his apparent grief, the thing still uppermost was that he had forfeited his kingly character: almost the only longing was, that Samuel should honour him before his people. And hence it comes to pass, that often remorse and anguish only begin with exposure. Suicide takes place, not when the act of wrong is done, but when the guilt is known, and hence, too, many a one becomes hardened, who would otherwise have remained tolerably happy; in consequence of which we blame the exposure, not the guilt; we say if it had hushed up, all would have been well; that the servant who robbed his master was ruined by taking away his character; and that if the sin had been passed over, repentance might have taken place, and he might have remained a respectable member of society. Do not think so. It is quite true that remorse was produced by exposure, and that the remorse was fatal; the sorrow which worked death arose from that exposure, and so far exposure may be called the cause. had it never taken place, respectability, and comparative peace, might have continued; but outward respectability is not change of heart. It is well known that the corpse has been preserved for centuries in the iceberg, or in antiseptic peat; and that when atmospheric air was introduced to the exposed surface it crumbled into dust. Exposure worked dissolution, but it

only manifested the death which was already there; so with sorrow, it is not the living heart which drops to pieces, or crumbles into dust, when it is revealed. Exposure did not work death in the Corinthian sinner, but life."

Who can say that this was not the effect in Achan's case? Judging by his free and open confession, so swiftly forced upon him, the opportunity for repentance was sincerely seized; and the low and poor measure of life, which would soon have expired under concealment, was enabled again to shew itself, ere its possessor was hurried into the more manifest presence of his Maker. This is why God so often deliberately exposes guilt: if the guilty have any remaining life, He would free that life from an oppressive and destroying incubus; if there be no life, He would reveal the death that is there, and thus give warning and salvation to the life that is in others. **II. The God-guided process of the lot.** Whatever may have been the exact method of the lot, the successive stages of its advance towards the detection of the criminal were marked with terrible certainty. There was no haste, and no hesitation; no faltering even for a moment, as if waiting for light, and no mistake which rendered necessary the retracing of a single step, or the repetition of any one ineffectual movement. Like the hound, which with keen powers of smelling, and a strong scent to guide it, running "breast high" towards its game, never hunting on the "heel," never pausing to recover scent, and never faltering till its fierce fangs meet in its exhausted victim; so the very lot itself must have seemed, to one man in that great multitude, as if mysteriously instinct with a life unerring in its discernment, and unrelenting in its pursuit. Changing the figure: from the circumference of that vast circle necessary to enclose the camp of Israel, *standing where Achan stood*, every line drawn to detect the guilty would seem, from the very first, to be pointing directly to himself, and to be coming ever nearer as it was produced successively through the three inscribed circles, the last of which narrowed the examination to his own immediate family: the twelve tribal lines of indication would centre on his tribe, the five lines from the ancestral heads of Judah would join together on his ancestor, Zarah (cf. Gen. xlvi. 12), the lines from the Zarhite ancestry would meet in the family of Zabdi, or Zimri (cf. 1 Chron. ii. 6), while the lines from the family of Zabdi, passing through the apparently thin house of Carmi, would focus themselves on Achan, becoming there, in their silent intensity, almost vocal with an utterance which, later on, rang out from the lips of an indignant prophet down into the conscience of another criminal—"Thou art the man." So surely was the lot guided to its mark by God. 1. *Learn the folly of all the attempts which are made to conceal sin.* Exposure, at the farthest, does but await the judgment of the Lord. 2. *Admire the glory of Divine omniscience.* God saw the acts of every man in the host of Israel, even during the tumult of war. He sees, not less accurately, the thoughts of every mind, and the desires of every heart. As Archbishop Secker quaintly puts it, "God hath a glazed window in the darkest houses of clay: He sees what is done in men, when none other can." **III. The God-honouring result of discovery.** 1. *The act of God, in this revelation of sin, carried with it the full concurrence of men.* (*a*) The transgressor himself fully acknowledged his guilt. Achan felt that he had done wickedly, nor could he dispute the justice of his sentence. (*b*) The spectators must have been equally impressed with the wisdom and justice and love of God. The confession of Achan vindicated Divine wisdom, the solemnity of the offence and the express terms of the covenant assured the people as to Divine justice, while in the stern execution of the sentence they might behold God's love hedging up as "with thorns" their own way to sin. (*c*) While the conscience and judgment of men were fully satisfied, the formalities prescribed by the law were also scrupulously met. The law explicitly stated: "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death." Although the lot had pointed out the guilty man, and Achan himself had confessed his sin, Joshua sent messengers to the tent to furnish yet further evidence of the transgression. 2. *This act of discovery was*

*not only a revelation in the present, but also light upon the past.* The defeat before Ai, the slaughter of the Israelites, and the slowness of the answer to the prayer of Joshua and the elders, were all explained now. Thus does the Divine discovery of human sin still light up the darkness of the past. Thus, too, will the revelation of the final judgment discover the cause of many defeats, shew the reason of much pain, and disclose the grounds of not a few unanswered prayers.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 16—18.—FAMILY HISTORY AND FAMILY SIN.

Joshua rose up early in the morning (1) when he was about to lead the people to behold God's wonderful works (chap. iii. 1—5; (2) when he was about to lead them to a great victory (chap. vi. 12, 14, 15); (3) when he was required to conduct this search for sin. Our vigilance must not be one-sided. He who would serve God indeed, must not only be active in duties which go with great honour and joy, but also in duties which are accompanied with much shame and sorrow. **I. The insufficiency of family name and greatness to shield men from sin.** "The tribe of Judah was taken." The tribe of Judah was considered the chief in Israel. This was the most numerous and powerful of all the tribes, and had assigned to it the place of honour in the general encampment around the tabernacle (cf. Numb. ii. 3). To this tribe, too, had come the richest blessing from their father Jacob; they were to be the royal family among all the families of Israel; in their inheritance should stand both the metropolis of the kingdom and the temple of the Lord, or, as the patriarch prophesied, "Unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Not all the prestige which came from past history, from present dignity, or from future prospects, saved Judah from this disgrace. 1. *There is no family name which stands sufficiently high to make pride allowable in any man.* 2. *No family dignity is great enough to furnish to any of its members securities against sin.* **II. The connection between a bad life and a bad antecedent history.** "He took the family of the Zarhites." It is sufficient merely to remind ourselves that Zarah, or Zerah, was one of the children of Judah's transgression. A fact like this might have weakened the moral force of Zerah through all his life, and have enfeebled the character of his descendants. One sin in a family often repeats itself in that family's subsequent history. He who sins, sins not only to himself, but to his children after him. **III. The wide intervening space which is sometimes seen between the conspicuous transgressions which mar the glory of a family name.** Judah sinned, but we hear little for good or evil about Zerah, or Zabdi, or Carmi. Their names never come into prominence in connection with either virtue or vice. Through the three intervening generations the family life went, for the most part, smoothly and quietly. Then Achan came, and another blot was made upon the family history. There may be a much closer connection between these prominent acts of wickedness in a family than we are accustomed to think. No one can assert that it is out of Judah's weakened life that sin, in another form, presently appears in the life of Achan; it is equally true that no one can prove the contrary. Speaking of the powers of memory, MacLaren has said, "The fragmentary remembrances which we have now, lift themselves above the ocean of forgetfulness like islands in some Archipelago, the summits of sister hills, though separated by the estranging sea that covers their converging sides and the valleys where their roots unite. The solid land is there, though hidden. Drain off the sea, and there will be no more isolated peaks, but continuous land. In this life we have but the island memories heaving themselves into sight, but in the next the Lord shall 'cause the sea to go back' by the breath of His mouth, and the channels of the great deep of a human heart's experiences and actions shall be laid bare." As it is with our memories of sin, so is it with the sins themselves.

Conspicuous transgressions stand island-like above the ocean of ordinary life and history, and succeeding generations, seeing one sin here and another there, treat them as separate and disconnected; but in the life to come, when there is "no more sea," and when we "know even as also we are known," it may appear that the huger evils which force themselves up above the common level of the family history are all connected by a chain of lesser transgressions which now lie hidden from our view.

"At the casting of the lots, we are not of course to suppose that all the male members of the tribes were present; but that the heads of the people attended, and the lots were cast on them in the following order: first, upon the heads of the twelve tribes; then upon the heads of all the clans of Judah; thirdly, upon the heads of the father-houses of the clan of Zerah; and lastly, upon the individual members of the father-house of Zabdi."—[*Keil.*]

Verse 19.—**I. The tenderness of Joshua towards the sinner.** "My son." "I pray thee." **II. The severity of Joshua toward the sin.** While Joshua speaks in accents of the utmost gentleness to Achan, he holds out no hope of pardon; he does but require the criminal to confess, that the glory of God may be made manifest before all Israel, and that Achan's hope for another life, if any, may not be destroyed by his obstinacy in this. Thus we are taught

"To hate the sin with all our heart,
And yet the sinner love."

THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE CONFESSION OF SIN.

I. To confess sin to be sinful, is a tribute to the glory of God as the upholder of the majesty of truth and the beauty of holiness. II. To confess sin, even when it is already detected, is to acknowledge God's glory in His omniscience. III. To confess sin which brings disgrace on the Lord's people, is to display the glory of God as consisting in light and truth, and not in concealment. IV. To confess sin at the Divine bidding, is to confess that the glory of God is independent of men. V. To confess sin, is to "give glory to the Lord God," not as adding to His glory, but as admitting and manifesting that glory. VI. To confess sin when the judgment of death will certainly follow, may be to hope in Divine mercy for the life to come, and thus to honour God's glory in forgiveness.

Verses 20, 21.—ACHAN'S CONFESSION OF HIS CRIME.

I. The confession as a revelation of human weakness. 1. *Man as too weak to see the beautiful.* The goodly garment was too attractive; it drew Achan into theft, and thus into forgetfulness of the rights of God. The beauties of Nature, and the beauties of Art, as leading men to forget God, merely appropriating pleasure, instead of also rendering praise. 2. *Man as too weak to behold the means of easily obtaining life's comforts.* Achan found the gold and silver too attractive also. Whatever might have been the difficulty of using these in the present, the day would doubtless come, he thought, when they would be a power. They would stand, then, for so much ease from labour, for so many of the necessaries and comforts of life, for so much social influence. Thus does the unlawful pursuit of wealth often lead men, still, to forget the claims of God. 3. *Man as too weak to be grateful.* In the very hour when victory had been given, that victory itself, if rightly used, leading on to a peaceful inheritance, Achan ungratefully forgat God. The mercies of the wilderness, the mercies of victory over Sihon and Og, the mercies of the passage of the Jordan, and the mercies of a renewed covenant at Gilgal, were all forgotten, and this in the very midst of new mercies at Jericho. A single coin, held close enough to the eye, will shut out the glory of the sun; so a little spoil, held too close to the heart in a spirit of covetousness, shut out from this man's soul the sight and remembrance of Jehovah's manifold goodness. And still this weakness repeats itself—worse than repeats itself. Less valuable spoils than these are not seldom permitted to shut out the cradle of the incarnation, the ministry of humiliation, the cross of

suffering, and thus, too, the present love of a living Christ. 4. *Man as too weak for faith.* God had said, "Lest ye make yourselves to be devoted." It may be that Achan had believed that, and felt its solemnity; with the glittering prize well before him, like many another in the hour of temptation, he was too feeble to believe then. 5. *Man as too weak to understand that the future will soon be the present.* Achan's lack of faith must surely have been unbelief, not disbelief. With so many assurances of God's power to see, and power to work, lying, as they did, close about him, he could not deliberately disbelieve that God saw, and that God would punish. The gold and the garment did but shut out the future; present pleasure and present possessions, just then, made up the whole vision of the man's life. So with many, to-day still obscures to-morrow, life hides death, and time shuts out eternity. **II. The confession as reiterating a needful warning.** 1. *It warns us to avoid temptation.* Here we may learn again to pray as Christ taught His disciples, "Lead us not into temptation." 2. *It teaches us to resist the beginnings of evil.* These beginnings of evil were, probably, long before Achan saw the spoil which tempted him to sin. It may be that an hour before he took the devoted things he would not have thought himself capable of the transgression; yet we are not therefore to think that the point where he began to go astray was in the actual sin. The very act of guilt supposes a previous life in which there had been low thoughts of sin, cold considerations of Divine goodness, and poor views of God Himself. It is here that the preparation for the reception of temptation constantly begins, and here that it can best be resisted. 3. *It warns us that repentance deferred is repentance embittered.* At no place would confession and restitution have been so easy as immediately after the sin. Every step, after the spoil was taken, made repentance harder: the defeat at Ai, the deaths of the slain, the grief of Joshua, and even the solemnities attending the lot, were all so many obstacles in the path backward. 4. *It shews us that confession at last is infinitely better than no confession at all.* This confession is the one and only softening feature of the wretched man's story; it is the one oasis in this moral desert, and even that is small. If there be any bow whatever in the cloud, it is that which is faintly reflected to us from these forced tears of penitence. **III. The confession as affording room for hope.** Are we to take the solemn judgment on Achan in this life as shutting out all hope for him in the life to come? 1. *There is no word uttered to tell us that Achan was eternally lost.* (*a*) The silence of the Bible on this point. Perhaps the darkest case mentioned in Scripture, excepting the parable of Dives, is that of Judas. Even here, the indication of the eternal state is dim, although very terrible: "It were good for that man if he had never been born".. "That he might go to his own place." And this seems to be the only instance in which the Bible indicates positively the eternal perdition of any one of its characters. True, to reverse a familiar line, there are many names, like those of Saul, Jeroboam, Ahab, and Ananias, which seem light with insufferable darkness, and yet even on the eternal state of these men the Scriptures are silent. (*b*) The mercy of this silence. Had the eternal state of wicked individuals been positively shewn, how many of the desponding living would have read their likeness in the character of some one known to be lost, and then have despairingly pronounced their own doom. (*c*) The hope that comes of this silence in cases like Achan's. Where God has not shut out all hope, and penitence leaves some room for hope, let us hope, even though we have to fear. 2. *The character of Achan's confession furnishes some slight ground for hope.* That it had been made earlier, every one must desire; yet even the confession of the penitent thief seems to have been made later. (*a*) Achan's confession has no apparent reservation. "I came, I saw, I coveted, I took, I hid," he says. (*b*) The confession has no attempt to implicate others. There is nothing here which corresponds with the word of the first man,—"The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she

gave me of the tree;" or with the similar utterance of the first woman,—"The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." (*c*) The confession has no attempt at excuse. The only word that looks towards anything else than Achan's own weakness, is that which names the "goodly" character of the Babylonish garment, and even this can hardly be said to plead the stress of the temptation. The acknowledgment throughout has a simple regard to the man's own wicked weakness. (*d*) The confession bears marks of sincerity. The first words of it almost anticipate the deep anguish in which David cried, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel," says Achan. Let us hope that the contrition was not in vain; let us also fear to stand at last where hope needs so many words to reveal it, and where, even then, it has to be left so faintly discernible.

Verse 21.—The Progress of Sin. "I. It enters by the eye. II. It sinks into the heart. III. It actuates the hand. IV. It leads to secresy and dissimulation. 'I *saw*,' etc. 'I *coveted*,' etc. 'I *took* and *hid* them in the earth.' Thus saith James: 'When lust (evil desire) is conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and when sin is finished, it bringeth forth death.'" [*Clarke.*]

Verses 22, 23.—The Beginning of the End of Transgression. I. **The wretched issue of dissembling.** "Behold, it was hid," etc. The hidden had become the revealed. That which had been so carefully and industriously concealed, the messengers now "behold," and it would soon be exposed before the eyes of all Israel. When God questions in the judgment, the things done in the body will be fully revealed. Not only will every person be present, but "we must all *appear* (be made manifest: *Alf.*) before the judgment seat of Christ." II. **The humiliating and impoverishing act of restitution.** "They took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua." Achan's labour had been all in vain. He was as poor, outwardly, as before the theft; and, in heart, his theft had left him bankrupt indeed. The gains of sin will all have presently to be returned. 1. *God will have every sinner, not only to repent, but, as far as is possible, to make restitution.* 2. *He who makes restitution too late, may have also to suffer retribution.* Anne of Austria, the Queen of France, when suffering from the repeated cruelties of her implacable enemy, Cardinal Richelieu, is said to have remarked: "My lord cardinal, there is one fact which you seem entirely to have forgotten. God is a sure paymaster. He may not pay at the end of every week, or month, or year; but I charge you, remember that He pays in the end." III. **The only place in which men can effectually deal with sin.** "They brought them unto Joshua . . . and poured them out before the Lord." 1. *We shall best discover sin as we search for it before the Lord.* Joshua had evidently conducted the inquisition for the offender immediately before the Ark of the Divine presence. Those who "walk in the light" of fellowship with God, will most readily detect iniquity. "Sin doth like itself appear" nowhere so much as beneath the cross of the Saviour. 2. *We can only rightly confess sin as we confess it before the Lord.* Thus, standing before the Ark, Joshua said unto Achan, "Give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him. Although the sin was to be told to Joshua, Achan was to feel and to acknowledge it as in the presence of Jehovah, and as sin against Him. 3. *We shall most effectually condemn sin as we judge it before the Lord.* Remembering the presence of Him who is merciful and gracious, and who will by no means clear the guilty, Joshua was very tender to the man, and very severe with the offence itself. There was a moral majesty about the bearing of Joshua, which must have very deeply impressed itself upon the people around him. We shall never condemn sin effectually, unless we bear ourselves towards men in "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," and towards sin in the spirit of Him who chose to suffer for it unto death, rather than to suffer it in others.

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 24—26.

### THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

When the Israelites were beaten back from Ai, and some of them slain, Joshua rent his clothes, and fell upon his face before the ark of the Lord, and fasted and prayed till the evening. He seems to have had some suspicion of evil among the people; his bearing and words have about them more of the tone of enquiry than of the spirit of complaint. Yet if Joshua suspected the people, he did not charge them with sin, or, apparently, so much as name it to them, until he knew from the lips of God that they were guilty. In the defeats and sufferings of men now, there may sometimes be cause to suspect that they are connected with transgression. But while defeat and suffering should lead us to examine ourselves, they should not lead us to make accusations against others. Let this course of treatment be recognised, and there would be no end to the recriminations of men against one another. It is related that Charles II. once said to John Milton, "Do not you think that your blindness is a judgment upon you for having written in defence of my father's murder?" "Sir," answered the poet, "it is true I have lost my eyes; but if all calamitous providences are to be considered as judgments, your majesty should remember that your royal father lost his head." Every man who heedlessly charges a fellow-creature to find in his afflictions a proof of his wickedness, is open to some retort, although his family history may not furnish occasion for a rebuke so severe as that which was deservedly administered by Milton.

The affliction of Israel in the repulse at Ai is clearly seen, at this stage of the history, to stand connected with the transgression of Achan. The sin has been traced home to the sinner, and he who has brought shame and death upon others, is here called to suffer in like manner himself. **I. Achan's punishment as the expression of a deep abhorrence of sin.** Every man in the camp may not actually have felt this abhorrence. Where one man was found willing to commit such wickedness, it may be that there were others found to sympathise with it. By the severity and manner of punishing Achan, God would teach all the people that sin was to be hated exceedingly. Everything which the transgressor had stolen was to be destroyed; the Babylonish garment, and even the silver and gold, were to be utterly put away. All the goods which Achan had possessed before his theft were likewise to be devoted; the very tent which had sheltered him and his, and the oxen and asses and sheep which he had accumulated, were to be burnt with fire. Even his sons and his daughters seem to have been stoned with him, and then in like manner to have been consumed. 1. *Iniquity is on no account to be passed over, but to be solemnly put away.* Men may be forgiven, but sin never; that is to say, sin may be forgiven unto men, but it must never be forgiven in itself. Sin must be put away (*a*) irrespective of temporal loss, (*b*) irrespective of social affections, (*c*) and irrespective of pain in its severest forms. 2. *The gains of iniquity are all to be esteemed unholy.* To retain the things which Achan had stolen would be to retain the sin. 3. *The gains of iniquity are not only accursed in themselves, they pollute also that which they touch.* Zacchæus restored not only that in which he had wronged his fellows, but fourfold. Such a restitution acknowledges that all the estate of a man is corrupted by its corrupt part. "The eagle, in the fable, that stole flesh from the altar, brought a coal of fire with it, which burnt her nest (Hab. ii. 9, 10; Zech. v. 4). They lose their own that grasp at more than their own." [*Henry.*] This expression of abhorrence against sin must not be held to relate merely to material possessions. The outward picture, given in such terrible colours to Israel, portrays also God's law for the inner life. The sins of the heart are to be equally hated, and similarly put away. As Arnot has written, "To cover the sin which lies on the conscience with a layer of earnest efforts to do right will not take the sin away; the underlying sin will assimilate all the dead works that may be heaped upon it, and the result will

be a greater mass of sin. **II. Achan's punishment as a vindication of God's law and covenant.** 1. *The punishment was to be carried out under the express provisions of the law.* The law held (*a*) that Achan had made himself and his people to be devoted by taking of the devoted thing (chap. vi. 18; Deut. vii. 26); (*b*) that those who were thus sentenced to die should, as for other capital offences, be stoned (Deut. xiii. 10); (*c*) that such individual persons as were put to death should be stoned without the camp (Lev. xxiv. 14); (*d*) that all the possessions of devoted persons, including the bodies of their slaughtered cattle, should be burnt, and that their own bodies should thus be consumed with their goods (Deut. xiii. 15—17). Thus in the destruction of Achan the formalities of the law were emphatically carried into execution. God would have the Israelites trace Achan's punishment, not to any sudden impulse of anger, but to that deliberate wrath against idolatry which stood as a perpetual record embodied in His covenant. 2. *The punishment was to be carried out in the true spirit and interests of law.* The one impression left on the thousands of Israel must have been that God would have His commandments honoured, no matter what the cost; yet the tenderness of Joshua and the merciful deliberateness of Jehovah must have assured the people that love to them, no less than hatred of sin, was moving slowly round and forward the wheels of this solemn judgment. **III. Achan's punishment as a memorial for future guidance and help.** Modern monuments are almost invariably, perhaps always, the records of triumphant personal career, or the memorials of national victory. Wisely or unwisely, men and nations now never celebrate their shame. History, more and more, gets to be one-sided; and while it presents much to animate, it has little to warn. The Israelites erected memorials of their great events, and not merely of their great victories. The passage of the Jordan has its cairn, but so has the grave of Achan; the stone of Ebenezer is set up between Mizpeh and Shen to tell the glory of victory, so also is the "very great heap of stones" piled over the body of Absalom, to perpetuate the shame of rebellion. This heap on the grave in the valley of Achor would be interpreted in Israel's after history:—1. *As a memorial of solemn warning.* Men should read there: "So speedily may sin be committed, so certainly does God behold it, so unerringly may it be revealed, and so bitter and shameful is its end. 2. *As a memorial of national purification and reconciliation with God.* If all Israel was held guilty in Achan's sin, not less is all Israel held purified in his punishment; the purification is judicial, rather than personal—it lies immediately in the direction of justification, and only indirectly in that of sanctification; but the purification is held by God to be real, and not fictitious. "The Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger," just as He had some time before declared that He would (Deut. xiii. 17). Nor is this turning from anger any less real than the anger itself. As under the Divine anger Israel had been defeated, so under the Divine forgiveness Israel proceeded directly to victory. Sin had been put away in God's method, and every person in the camp, not long since held to be "accursed," or "devoted," might now proceed to say, "There is therefore now no condemnation." It should be noticed that in this revelation of God's mind on the question of forgiving sin, there is absolutely no room for the commercial theory of an equivalent in atonement. All Israel was solemnly held to be worthy of death in Achan's sin, but it cannot be pretended that the lives of Achan and his family were an equivalent for the lives of all the people. Atonement is here proclaimed to be, not so much value in blood for so much sin, but an adequate expression of a general abhorrence of sin so great that God who forgives, and man who is forgiven, alike are seen determining that, whatever the cost, sin shall not be tolerated even for a moment. Thus is law "magnified and made honourable;" thus, too, does Divine love proclaim itself in the one and only direction in which God could speak, or man be benefited—the direction of right, and truth, and purity. 3. *As a memorial for guidance into hope in times of future darkness.* The remembrance of Divine mercy which followed human penitence should long abide with Israel.

In times when the national sin would lead to God's departure, and to the consequent darkness of succeeding defeat, this vision of Achor should become a bow in the cloud, teaching the godly not to despair. It should be even more than this; it should become as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and victory shall take the place of defeat; Repent ye, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Thus more than six centuries later the Lord stirred again the pulse of the national feeling by crying through Hosea, "I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope." Still later, Isaiah was taught to sing: "And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place to lie down in, for my people that have sought me." So careful is Divine mercy ever to leave a place to which sinful men may return in tears, and from which they may presently sing in joy, "We are saved by hope." Let who will teach himself to despair, God ever leaves the fastenings of the "door of hope" well within reach of the hand of penitence.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verses 24—26.—The Door of Hope.**

Read in connection with Hosea's obvious reference to this solemn incident, some such thoughts as the following might be expanded to profit:—

**I. The unconscious beginnings of hope in the place of human sin and trouble.**

**II. The silent growth of hope under Divine chastisement.**

**III. Hope becoming visible through the putting away of iniquity.**

**IV. Hope fully revealed through words of Divine pardon and the witness of succeeding victories.**

### The Judgment in the Valley of Achor.

**From the foregoing narrative we may learn:**

**I. The deceitfulness of sin. II. The certainty of its exposure. III. The awfulness of its reward."** [*Bush.*]

### The Certainty and Severity of Sin's Punishment.

"Punishment is the recoil of crime; and the strength of the back stroke is in proportion to the original blow." [*French.*]

"The thought of the future punishment for the wicked which the Bible reveals is enough to make an earthquake of terror in every man's soul. I do not accept the doctrine of eternal punishment because I delight in it. I would cast in doubts, if I could, till I had filled hell up to the brim; I would destroy all faith in it; but that would do me no good: I could not destroy the thing. Nor does it help me to take the word 'everlasting,' and put it into a rack, like an inquisitor, until I make it shriek out some other meaning: I cannot alter the stern fact." [*Beecher.*]

"Day and night follow each other not more surely than punishment comes upon sin. Whether the sin be great or little, momentary or habitual, wilful or through infirmity, its own peculiar punishment seems, according to the law of nature, to follow, as far as our experience of that law carries us, sooner or later, lighter or heavier, as the case may be. . . . Who can pretend to estimate the effect of apparently slight transgression upon the spiritual state of any one of us? Who can pretend to say what the effect of it is in God's sight? What do the angels think of it? What does our own guardian angel, if one be vouchsafed us, who has watched over us, and been intimate with us from our youth up; who joyed to see how we once grew together with God's grace, but who now is in fear for us? Alas! what is the real condition of our heart itself? Dead bodies keep their warmth a short time; and who can tell but a soul so circumstanced may be severed from the grace of the ordinances, though he partakes them outwardly, and is but existing upon and exhausting the small treasure of strength and life which is laid up within him? Nay, we know that so it really is, if the sin be deliberate and wilful; for the word of Scripture assures us that such sin shuts us out from God's presence, and obstructs the channels by which He gives us grace." [*J. H. Newman.*]

"Let us suppose, that at the time when Britain was peopled by half-savage tribes, before the period of the Roman sway, some gifted seer among the Druids had engraven upon a rock a minute prediction of a portion of the future history of the island. Suppose he had declared that it should, ere long, be conquered by a warrior people from the south; that he should name the Cæsar himself, describe his eagle standard, and all the circumstances of the conquest. Suppose he should portray the Saxon invasion centuries after, the sevenfold division of the monarchy, the Danish inroad, the arrival and victory of the Normans. Our imagined prophet pauses here, or at whatever other precise period you

please to suppose; and his next prediction, overleaping a vast undescribed interval, suddenly represents the England of the present day. Now conceive the forefathers of existing England to have studied this wondrous record, and to find, to their amazement, that every one of its predictions was accurately verified; that, as their generations succeeded, they but walked in the traces assigned for them by the prophetic inscription, and all it spoke progressively became fact. Can we suppose, that however far away in futurity was the one remaining event, and however impossible to *them*, at their early stage, to conceive the means by which all the present wonders of this mighty empire could ever be realised, they would permit themselves to doubt its absolute certainty after such overwhelming proofs of the supernatural powers of the seer who guaranteed it? Would they not shape their course as confidently in view of the unquestionable future as in reference to the unquestionable past? It should be thus with regard to the coming judgment." [*Archer Butler.*]

THE SPIRIT IN WHICH SIN IS TO BE CONFRONTED.

"Sin is never at a stay; if we do not retreat from it, we shall advance in it; and the further on we go, the more we have to come back." [*Barrow.*]

"Use sin as it will use you: spare it not, for it will not spare you; it is your murderer, and the murderer of the world; use it therefore as a murderer should be used. Kill it before it kills you; and though it kill your bodies, it shall not be able to kill your souls; and though it bring you to the grave, as it did your Head, it shall not be able to keep you there. If the thoughts of death and the grave be not pleasant to you, hearken to every temptation to sin as you would hearken to a temptation to self-murder. You love not death; love not the cause of death." [*Baxter.*]

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *VICTORY RESTORED AT AI, AND THE LAW PROCLAIMED AT EBAL.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **Take all the people of war**] The total number of men capable of bearing arms, omitting the seventy thousand left on the eastern side of Jordan, amounted to rather more than 531,000. It is not likely that all of these were taken up to make war on Ai. By "all the people of war" we may understand a body of chosen troops made up by selection from the various tribes; or, as the third verse suggests, "all the people of war" were mustered, and then thirty thousand were chosen from the assembled host. 2. **As thou didst unto Jericho and her king**] This alludes *in general terms* to the devoting of the city and its inhabitants, the one by burning, and the other by death. At Jericho the spoil was made *cherem;* here it was given to the people. The king of Jericho seems to have been slain with the sword; the king of Ai was hanged, although it is likely that he was first put to death in some other way. **Lay thee an ambush**] "The question put by many with reference to the propriety of employing stratagem in order to deceive an enemy, indicates excessive ignorance. For it is certainly not physical force alone which determines the issue of war, but, on the contrary, those are pronounced the best generals, whose success is due less to force than to skilful manœuvres. Therefore, if war is lawful at all, it is indisputably right to avail oneself of those arts by which victory is usually obtained. It is of course understood that neither must treaties be violated, nor faith broken in any other way." (*Calvin.*) 3. **Thirty thousand . . . and sent them away**] Probably 30,000 was the entire number chosen to operate against Ai, and of these 5000 were sent, as stated in verse 12, to form the ambush between Bethel and Ai. To suppose two ambushes, one of 30,000 on the south-west, and one of 5000 on the north-west of the city, requires the further supposition that Joshua would have led all the remaining men of war in the camp, nearly half a million, to the first assault. As the fighting men of Ai could not have amounted to more than two or three thousand, it is not likely that Joshua feigned to flee before this small band with an army of half a million soldiers. On whichever hypothesis the passage is interpreted, there are great difficulties to be explained; but the view suggested, taken with the inartistic repetitions and anticipations of the narrative, which are common also to the historian's style in chap. vi., affords much the easier solution. 5. **As at the first**] The first battle, when the Israelites fled in defeat (chap. vii. 4). 9. **Sent them forth**] The five thousand intended for the ambush. **Joshua lodged that night among the people**] Probably among the twenty-five thousand, already in the neighbourhood of Ai. If Joshua lodged in the camp at Gilgal, which was about twenty-five miles from Ai, the ambush would have been compelled to lie in hiding, over one entire day, between the two cities. This could hardly be done without discovery, nor would it have served any purpose to incur such risk. 10. **Joshua rose up early**] We may suppose the two divisions of the army to have started about seven o'clock in the evening, having before them a march of some eight hours. This would allow each division to arrive at its destination shortly after three in the morning. Both divisions would probably leave Gilgal in company (ver. 3), and march for four or five hours *together*, along a common road. The main body

would then bear away to the right, to take up its position on the north of the city, while the ambush would diverge to the left, pass Ai on the south, and gain its hiding-place on the west of the city; thus avoiding the danger of discovery from crossing the road between Bethel and Ai. Each division on arriving at its post, say about three o'clock, would proceed to take some rest; "but Joshua lodged that night among the people," *i.e.*, among the main body of the army. Sleeping for one or two hours, Joshua might rise by five (ver. 10), silently call up, and once more review his army, send messengers across the main road between the two cities to communicate with the ambush, ascertaining their safe arrival, and giving them final instructions (ver. 12); and then, still in "that night" (ver. 13), or by six o'clock in the morning, march his 25,000 men from the temporary encampment on the north of Ai "into the midst of the valley," and in open view of their enemies. Here they were almost immediately seen, and the men of Ai "hasted and rose up *early*" (ver. 14), and forthwith the battle began. 12. **And he took**] Translated by *pluperfect*—"*He had taken;* so *Masius, C. a Lapide,* and others. "This expresses the sense, but is not justifiable as a translation." (*Keil.*) Probably the historian only intended to refer to the communication with the ambush, made in the early morning, from the northern side of the city. 17. **Not a man left in Ai**] Not a soldier. It is evident, by verse 24, that the women, children, and others unable to bear arms remained within the city. **Or Bethel**] It is likely that Bethel was only one or two miles distant, and the two cities were evidently in league on this occasion. Probably Bethel shared the fate of Ai (cf. chap. xii. 16). 20. **They had no power**] *Heb.*=*no hands:* there was no direction in which they could flee; they were enclosed on all sides,—surrounded, as we say, "on every hand." 25. **Twelve thousand**] This number is given, not as the number of the soldiers of Ai, but as that of the entire population. In addition to these, it is likely that some of the inhabitants of Bethel were slain on this day. 29. **Hanged on a tree**] Possibly he was first slain with the sword (cf. chap. x. 26). **Until eventide**] According to the instructions in Deut. xxi. 22, 23. 30. **Then Joshua built an altar**] Those who regard this section of the chapter as misplaced in the book have surely not sufficiently considered the command given in Deut. xxvii. 2—8. The Israelites were there solemnly charged to seize the first available opportunity for this work, after crossing the Jordan. 31. **An altar of whole stones**] Cf. Ex. xx. 24, 25. The reason for this command is not given, either here or elsewhere in Scripture. 32. **Wrote there upon the stones**] Upon the plaster with which the stones were to be covered. These were not the stones of the altar itself, but rude pillars of stone reared near to the altar (cf. Deut. xxvii. 2—4). **A copy of the law of Moses**] *Lit.* = a double, or duplicate of the law. It seems natural to suppose that only the commandments which Moses commanded them on that day, *i.e.*, the blessings and cursings ordered to be pronounced, were thus written. **Compare Deut. xxvii. 3, 8, with verses 1, 26 of the same chapter, and with Josh. viii. 34.**

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1, 2.

### The Raising up of the Fallen.

The Bible is the only book from which men have learned to encourage each other to sing, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." Men tread down the fallen, and those who have suffered moral disgrace have little to hope from "the tender mercies of the wicked," which are ever cruel in proportion to the wickedness of those who shew them. It is only from Divine lips that we hear the assurance, "To the poor the Gospel is preached." For the outcast and the fallen the Pharisees had no good tidings; they made broad their phylacteries, and murmured of Him who came to give hope to such, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them;" and yet these Pharisees were the very men whose fathers had been taught to say, "He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

Three things may be noticed in these two verses:—**I. The completeness of Divine pardon.** No sooner had the people put away their sin than "the Lord said unto Joshua, Fear not." The Divine manifestation of love was as full as though no sin had been committed. The encouragement given here is as free from restraint as the encouragement in chap. i. 9. 1. *No man should postpone repentance on the ground of fear.* How differently does God appear in these two chapters! in the seventh there was every cause for fear; in this there was every

reason for trust. Blake, the painter, in his energetic lines addressed to the tiger, abruptly and with wonder asks the fierce beast,

"Did He that made the lamb make thee?"

The God of the tiger seems one God, and the God of the lamb appears almost as another God. All life shews God passing before us in what seem to us these conflicting manifestations of Himself. The God of spring and plenty and health seems one Being; the God of winter and of famine and of sickness appears as if another. The God of our children's cradles is one to whom we lift our eyes in thankfulness and love; the God of their coffins, and of our other bereavements, is one to whom, if we are not well taught, we are tempted to look up with fear and dismay, and ask, Who art Thou, Thou Dreadful One, that Thou smitest thus severely? So, to Israel, the Lord must have seemed in the first attack on Ai, and in the subsequent inquisition and judgment, a God greatly to be feared; here, all Israel would have felt again, that He was a God to be adored and delighted in and loved. We misunderstand the Heart that always loves us, in whatever form it manifests itself; and we mistake the time for fear. When a ship is sailing in tropical regions, there will sometimes come over the ocean an unusual calm. The mere passenger might enjoy it, and mistake it for peace. Not so the captain: he hastens to his instruments, marks the rapid fall of the mercury, and turning again promptly to his crew, in tones that mark urgency and coming danger he bids them "Furl all." In the intense stillness in which a landsman might admire the deep peace of the sea, the sailor beholds the hushed waves listening, as with bated breath, to the tread of the coming tempest, ere the wild cyclone rushes madly across the ocean. Men are at peace when they should fear, and fear when they should be at peace. "The Lord raiseth up all those that be bowed down." It is not the contrite man, but the unrepentant, who has cause to fear that God will turn against him. The Pharisees may well cower before the indignant looks and words of Christ; the woman in tears at His feet may trust and not be afraid. The conflict of Paul with sin, recorded in the seventh chapter of the Romans, does but make way for the joy and confidence so soon after expressed in the eighth.

2. *No man should think that a given amount of formal repentance will necessarily be followed by a given amount of spiritual peace.* There seems a kind of intentional irregularity in God's method of assuring men of the forgiveness of sin; just as, in the outward aspect, there is an intentional irregularity in the Divine method of answering prayer. No intelligent Christian thinks that God answers prayer by machinery which regulates the quantity of answer according to the quantity of utterance; He answers prayer by infinite love, and wisdom, and patience, and therefore with infinite variations. A given amount of prayer from a hungry Christian will not come out a given amount of bread, as though human supplications were so much corn, and the throne of grace were mill and bakehouse in one. If so many prayers resulted regularly in so many loaves, then farewell to honest industry and to the discipline of healthy labour: for men would turn into spiritual vagrants by the million; just as here, in London, the routine charity of foolish and indiscriminate givers, makes hundreds of beggars every year, and spreads an influence of easy indifference to pauperism, till it weakens and contaminates the minds of even the honest and manly poor. God loves us too much and too wisely to turn men into spiritual paupers thus; and therefore He answers prayer, as we call it, "by crosses," or He keeps us waiting, or He seems not to answer at all. Intelligent Christians have always understood that so many words of prayer could never be equivalent to so many temporal gifts, to so many sins forgiven, or to so much assurance of grace from on high. There is, and for the same reason there must be, a similar irregularity in God's method of assuring men of forgiveness. A given amount of pain and tears can have no exact and ascertained relation to the time when His sinful children shall hear Him say again, "Fear not, neither be thou dismayed." If in all the future national sins of Israel the people had said, "The sacrifice of one family in the valley of Achor brought Divine forgive-

ness, and saved the nation when the nation had sinned then; therefore we will sacrifice another family, and save the nation now; and we will always sacrifice a family for the sake of the nation when we get into similar disfavour with God: if the Israelites had said that, or felt and acted like that, the valley of Achor, instead of being "a door of hope," would have become a door through which would have entered into the national life and history a horrible system of alternating sin and sacrifices, of selfishness and cruelty. God may keep the penitent waiting ere He speaks the words, "Fear not," so as to be heard; let it be enough for us to know that all the penitent are forgiven when they come to God in tears for sin, and with faith in the offering of Christ; and that ultimately, if not immediately, those who wait thus on the Lord will enter into the peace of manifest reconciliation. 3. *When pardon is pronounced by God, every forgiven man should regard it as perfect, and wanting nothing.* After the penitence of Israel, and the punishment of Achan, the way to victory was held to be as open and clear as before Achan had sinned. "As far as the east is from the west," so far was this transgression put away. God had "cast it behind His back," and it was no more in view as a reproach to the people, or as a hindrance to their triumph. Many a man has felt the purity of child-life contrasting so painfully with the sin-stained course of his maturer years, that he has responded with all his heart to the feeling of one similarly moved:—

> "I could have turned
> Into my yesterdays, and wandered back
> To distant childhood, and gone out to God
> By the gate of birth, not death."

We cannot but be ashamed of our transgressions, yet we need not mourn that we cannot go forth to God thus; nor need we fear to meet Him in the way which is common unto men, for His forgiveness is complete, and His welcome of every pardoned child will be as though sin had never been committed. **II. The beauty of Divine gentleness.** God said to Joshua, and through Joshua to all Israel, "Fear not, neither be thou dismayed." "As one whom his mother comforteth," so was Joshua gently assured and comforted by the Lord. 1. *Divine gentleness should be considered in relation to Divine power.* The gentleness of an infant surprises no one, but that of a strong warrior is imposing. A true representation of tenderness must have power for its background. It is in this aspect that the gentleness of Christ becomes so real and so attractive. It is He who stills the storm with a word, that blesses the little children; it is He who calls men calmly back from the grave, that tenderly concerns Himself lest the unfed thousands faint by the way; in a word, the Lion of the tribe of Judah is also the Lamb of God. Quite in harmony with this, He who says "Fear not" to Joshua, is also He who smote Pharaoh, who made a path through the sea, who sent the manna for forty years, and who gave Israel water from the rocks of the wilderness. The words "Fear not" could have given little comfort from the lips of a feeble child; it was another thing to hear them from Him who had so recently overthrown "famous kings," divided the Jordan, and given the marvellous triumph at Jericho. It is the God of the sun and stars, and of all the universe, who stands by the cross of Jesus, and says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" it is the Lord of all power and might who softly whispers to His troubled disciples through all time, "Fear not, little flock: it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." 2. *Divine gentleness to sinners should be considered in connection with Divine sensibility to sin.* Men are gentle to transgressors from indifference to transgression. The life of Christ is full of incident and utterance, in which stern deeds and words of wrath against sin mingle with gentle assurances to the penitent and fearful. Almost in a breath the Saviour proclaims woe unto Chorazin, to Bethsaida, and to Capernaum, and then adds, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Similarly, Luke tells us, in a single paragraph, how Christ wept over Jerusalem, and then, with the

tears hardly dried from His face, how He went into the temple and began to cast out them that sold therein and them that bought. So, in this page of the history of Israel, we see Jehovah, in one chapter, solemnly insisting on the death of Achan, and forthwith, in this, tenderly assuring Joshua of coming victory. It is a God so sensitive to sin, and one hating it so severely, who proposes to say to every penitent believer in His Son, "Thy sins, which be many, are all forgiven thee: *go in peace.*" **III. The fulness of Divine encouragement.** All that Joshua just now wanted to know was communicated to him by Jehovah. 1. *We see God giving special promises for peculiar discouragement.* Divine comfort has about it nothing vague: it does not end in mere generalities. The utterances of Scripture are definite, and meet us in our actual necessities. 2. *God's encouragement is corrective of former errors.* "Take all the people of war with thee." This is set over against the former mistake arising from the counsel of the spies. The words of the Lord deal not only with our need in the future, but with our errors in the past. 3. *God's encouragements have regard to the nature of His people's dejection.* The Israelites are suffered to take at least thirty thousand men to give battle to not more than three or four thousand of their foes. In the time of great weakness, God suffers us, somewhat more than in ordinary life, to take hope from things visible. 4. *God's encouragement is given in the form of a promise already proved.* Compare the words, "Fear not, neither be thou dismayed," with chap. i. 9 and Deut. xxxi. 6—8. The whole of the Church above has gone before us, proving for our use the words in which God asks us each for a little longer to trust and not be afraid.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 1.—Freedom from Fear: Its Necessity, Grounds, and Encouragements.

**I. The necessity of freedom from fear and dismay.** 1. *Confidence is necessary for active warfare.* 2. *Confidence is necessary for successful work.* 3. *Confidence is necessary for patient endurance.* 4. *Confidence is necessary for spiritual growth.*

**II. The ground of freedom from fear and dismay.** "I have given into thine hand," etc. 1. *There is no other ground sufficiently philosophical.* True wisdom is on the side of trusting God. The human brain unperverted by the allurements of the world, the pride of the heart, and the scorn of men, ever elects to "wait on the Lord." 2. *There is no other ground sufficiently pleasing.* Imagination is on the side of trusting God. Music, painting, poetry, and everything which moves and delights the human fancy has found a sufficient theatre nowhere but in the faith of Him. Deity is infinite space in the beautiful, where holy imagination can rove at large, never wearied, and ever delighted. 3. *There is no other ground sufficiently precious.* Our hearts are on the side of trusting God. If the intellect and the fancy sometimes find a temporary resting place in men or things, the heart never can be satisfied excepting in the Lord. The being who has been made in the Divine image can find no sufficient and ultimate home for his love, saving in the heart of Him who is love. 4. *There is no other ground sufficiently proved.* History is on the side of trusting God. "Our fathers trusted in Thee, and were not confounded," can only be said of one Helper. He who goes forth to meet the giant enemies of life with any other weapons than those furnished by the Lord of life, will, sooner or later, fear to meet his foes, and will cry with the shepherd youth of Israel, when dressed in the armour of his king, "I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them."

**III. The encouragements to freedom from fear and dismay.** 1. *There is error to be vanquished.* The Israelites might rejoice in the overthrow of idolatry. They were not to delight in slaying men, but to exult over the fall of error which had brought such multitudes to the saddest form of death. Wellington's grief at Waterloo. 2. *There is honour*

*to be won.* In God's battles, this is no empty thing tacked on from without; no medal, which can be cast in a die; no ribbon, which depends on texture and colour for its brightness. Every real victory in the way of truth brings to each triumphant soldier of Christ a holy sense of exaltation within himself. He may say: By God's grace I have helped the cause of righteousness; I have removed some temptations; I have helped weak men about me now, and the weak of the ages to come. In the warfare of life, every damaged idol may stand for a delivered man. 3. *There is reward to be gathered.* The spoil of Ai was to be given to Israel. Spiritual victory has nobler and richer gains both here and hereafter.

"God's Renewed Call to Joshua. This is the same word indeed as before, but now of quite a different import, since God by it not only assures Joshua of His support, but also gives him to understand that He is again gracious to Him."—[*Lange.*]

"Joshua needed the comforting exhortation after the bitter experiences through which he had just passed. Comp. Acts xviii. 9, 10, xxvii. 23, 24."—[*Crosby.*]

"Although every victory comes from God, it is still in the order of our own fidelity and bravery."—[*Starke.*]

"The fortune of war is changeable, but it turns as the Lord will have."—[*Bib. Tub.*]

Verse 2.—God will have the first-fruits, in order to teach us whence all fruits come, and to whom they all belong.

God gives His people the subsequent fruits, to shew them that they can win nothing which is essential to Him, and to make manifest His love and care for them.

God thus makes both firstfruits and after-fruits to serve His people's good.

"The way to have the comfort of what God allows us is to forbear what He forbids us. No man shall lose by his self-denial; let God have His dues first, and then all will be clean to us, and sure, 1 Kings xvii. 13."—[*Henry.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3—29.*

### The Ultimate Victory of God and of Truth.

**I. The variable methods of God.** (Verses 3—13.) If we look at the two attacks on Ai, we see that in the first God was not there, while in the last He chose to be present: the first attack failed utterly; in the last, victory was complete. Comparing the overthrow of Jericho and that of Ai, we see that, by the deliberate choice of Jehovah, the attack on the former city lasted seven days, while that on Ai was accomplished in one; the assault on Jericho was without the slightest concealment, that on Ai was made apparently dependent on strategy. In view of these differences it may be remarked:—1. *The Divine method sometimes teaches us that the beginning of real victory is through stern defeat.* When Israel suffered defeat, Joshua could not interpret the way of the Lord. He cried, in his anguish, "O Lord, wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan?" Now Joshua could clearly see that but for the defeat graciously ordered by God, sin would have prevented victory in its highest form. It was manifest now, that for God to have made Israel triumphant then, would simply have been for Him to have chosen against one sinful people in favour of another. Learn the folly of habitually judging a whole by its parts. We cannot judge a watch by a wheel. We should know almost nothing of the beauty of Handel's Messiah by taking two or three bars from any one of its choruses or solos. No man could form a good opinion of a poem from one or two lines, selected at random. It would be foolish to endeavour to pronounce on the merits of a painting by examining a small fraction cut from any part of the whole. When we attempt to interpret Divine providence, we can only do it in fragments. God's

plan is very vast: it has relation, not only to our present, but to all our life; it includes not only us, but ten thousand others who surround us. We must not expect to judge the heart of the Lord aright by a broken limb, by a heavy loss of property, by a severe sickness, or by the severity of some trying bereavement. He is wise who studies the love of God in His dealings with men generally, who contemplates "the image of God in the face of Jesus Christ," and who hears his Lord say, What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter. 2. *The Divine method sometimes shews that all real victory depends absolutely on God, and, at others, makes it clear that without the utmost efforts of man, everything will fail.* Jericho shewed men that God must be all in all; Ai, that men must do all that human skill and power could devise and execute. Truth is very large, and we cannot learn or even survey it on all sides at once. Men teach their children sometimes reading, sometimes writing, sometimes arithmetic, sometimes poetry; but reading and writing are not adverse the one to the other, nor is arithmetic a contradiction of poetry. God teaches us now one thing, and now another, because our powers of perception are very limited, and our views of truth are necessarily partial, while He is sufficiently gentle and patient to endeavour to lead us into all truth. 3. *The variableness of Divine methods has regard to the specific forms of human necessity.* If the first experience at Ai had preceded the victory at Jericho, how great would have been the consternation in Israel! If the absolute victory at Jericho had been succeeded by a similar triumph at Ai, notwithstanding the sin of Achan, how sadly might the people have been demoralised! If the defeat which followed the first attack on Ai had been repeated now, how the hearts of the people would have "melted and become as water" indeed! God not only teaches us in separate lessons, but He never teaches us the wrong lesson first. At the entrance into Canaan, even as at the cross of Christ, we hear the Divine voice proclaiming to men: "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." **II. The fatuity of the enemies of God.** A recent author has said concerning the overthrow of Pharaoh: "It is written that Pharaoh hardened his heart, and this again and again; as well as, and we may be sure to all intents and purposes antecedently to, the fact that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh would have it so. Judicial blindness set in after a time; but first there had been cause shewn in Heaven's chancery court. The infatuation was beyond remedy. The ossification of the heart involved, in its progress and development, paralysis of the brain. Dementation was now the precursor of perdition. '*Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat.*'" Thus it ever proves with those who determinately set themselves against the Lord. Persistent sin works blindness, stupidity, madness; and madness needs only to be left to itself to accomplish destruction. God has ordained that blind folly shall be the outcome of persistent sin, and that destruction, in its turn, shall be the result of folly. Thus did Pharaoh foolishly pursue after Israel into the midst of the sea; and thus, with equal blindness, the three or four thousand men of Ai rushed out of their city against the overwhelming numbers of their foes. It was the forerunning madness of idolatrous men whom God had determined to destroy. 1. *The enemies of the Lord are ignorant of the cause of their victories.* These idolaters had put down their former triumph to the strength of Aiite arms, utterly unconscious that it was entirely owing to wickedness in Israelitish hearts. It is ever so. The wicked flourish, and do not know that their prosperity is but temporarily given them by God, that His people may be better enabled to discover and put away sin; or that some other equally important purpose is to be served by their brief period of exaltation. 2. *The enemies of the Lord are ignorant of changes in God's appointments.* The men of Ai "wist not that there were liers in ambush." God changes His plan of battle, and while the secret of the Lord is often with them that fear Him, the enemies of truth know nothing of His way: they have no access to His throne, and no acquaintance with His counsels. 3. *The enemies of the Lord are absolutely powerless before those whom God guides and helps.* "They

had no power to flee this way or that way" (verse 20). (*a*) They had *no way* by which to flee (cf. Crit. Notes). They were surrounded on every hand. (*b*) They had *no strength* to flee. The hand is sometimes put for the symbol of power, as in Psalm lxxvi. 5. Probably the former is the more correct meaning, although it should not be forgotten that, practically taken, it involves the latter. Read in either sense, it is seen that when God makes bare His arm, His foes are utterly helpless; the ways of escape are closed up, and courage and strength fail together. **III. The ultimate triumph of God and of truth.** As with the men of Ai, the triumphs of the wicked are but the forerunners of their fall. 1. *The final victory of God will leave none to uphold error* (verses 22—25). Not a Canaanite was left to perpetuate idolatry. The wicked live on Divine sufferance, even as others, although they exalt themselves against God: when their salvation has become hopeless, and God wills it, they are removed out of their place. The tares only grow till God's harvest is ready; when that time comes, God will leave not a single seed to re-sow the "new earth" with sin. 2. *The final victory of God will sink the greatest of His foes even lower than the least.* "The king of Ai he hanged on a tree," *etc.* The measure of a wicked man's elevation here will be the measure of his degradation when God goes forth for his overthrow; then "the first shall be last."

> "Each minute of man's safety he does walk
> A bridge, no thicker than his frozen breath,
> O'er a precipitous and craggy danger
> Yawning to death."

Every enemy of God and truth should feel that, but he who is as a king among the wicked should read in it the most dreadful meaning; beneath the lowest deep which remains for others, he should discover a lower still, yawning for himself. In human wars, officers who are taken prisoners receive superior treatment to that afforded to privates; their fare is better, their lodging superior, and their confinement is sometimes not so strict. This may be well among men, where each side generally represents at least some elements of right and truth. In this war of the Lord, truth and right are all with Him, and, as in cases of rebellion and treason among nations, those who are ringleaders are regarded as being worst. 3. *The final victory of God will leave no memorials of error, excepting memorials of shame.* Joshua made Ai "an heap for ever," and over the dead and dishonoured body of its king he raised "a great heap of stones." The righteous man, "being dead, yet speaketh;" so does the wicked, but every tongue which is left to proclaim his name declares also his disgrace.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 3—8.—The Address to the Soldiers of the Expedition.

This address marks with some emphasis and distinctness several features in the character of Israel's leader. **I. Joshua's obedience.** As soon as he knew the Divine will he arose promptly, and at once selected the troops which were to be engaged (verse 3). The closing words of his address shew that his one concern was to perform the commandment of the Lord (verse 8). That command was uppermost in his own mind; he would have it stand before everything else in the minds of the people also. A godly man is anxious to do the will of the Lord himself; he is equally concerned to lead others into obedience. **II. Joshua's prudence.** He enters *heartily* into the details of God's plan for secresy. The language is evidently that of a man who is in earnest to leave nothing undone to ensure success with as little loss as possible. The people are "sent away in the night." The plan of the ambush is sufficiently explained to make it of interest to all. It is not enough to be zealous and prompt; God says of Jesus Christ, our pattern in work and conflict: "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently." **III. Joshua's courage.** "I, and all the

people that are with me, will approach unto the city." Joshua did not send others to do dangerous work, and abstain from it himself. Although, as the commander of the forces, he might not have been personally engaged in the conflict, yet he was present on the field of battle, and evidently shared the dangers of the day. **IV. Joshua's faith.** (Verses 6, 7.) If the former of these two verses shews confidence in the success of the stratagem, the latter proclaims that this confidence has its real ground in the promise of Jehovah. Joshua uses the means at his disposal with all the tact and energy possible, and then believes in the Lord. "The Lord your God will deliver it into your hand." The Divine consolation had left no room for pain, and the Divine promise no room for doubt. The "fear not," of verse 1, had banished all anxiety, and the "I have given" had imparted calm assurance. The trust of God's forgiven children should be as perfect as though they had never fallen under their heavenly Father's displeasure. **V. Joshua's authority.** (Verse 8.) He made the people feel that his own commands were but the reiterated commands of the Lord. 1. *The authority of all God-given words.* We too often speak the Lord's words as if they were our own. He who does this will assuredly weaken them. There are very few things, perhaps, in which we need concern ourselves to imitate men who, in the present day, claim to be priests over their fellows; many ministers might profitably learn from them to teach the Lord's words as having the Lord's authority. It is possible to be so intent on commending the truth by argument or anecdote, as to weaken the truth. Many who "beseech men in Christ's stead," lamentably need the tone of "ambassadors." 2. *The authority of obedience.* "According to the commandment of the Lord shall ye do. See I have commanded you." The leader who shews his own obedience can shew no better right to be obeyed.

Verse 4.—The Locality of Ai: Its Suitability for Concealing the Ambush.

"No neighbourhood in Palestine is more crowded with interesting Biblical associations than this. I should like to spend a day wandering over the rough hills between Er Ram, Gibeah, Michmash, Rimmon, Bethel, and Beer. Perhaps we might stumble upon the site of Ai, which Joshua's curse has hidden from all the world; for he 'burned Ai, and made it a heap for ever, even a desolation unto this day.' It must be somewhere between Michmash and Rimmon, a region greatly cut up with gorges and ravines; and as I passed from Beit-in toward Michmash, I could easily understand how Joshua's ambush of five thousand men could lie hid between Ai and Bethel. Some of our Jerusalem friends identify Ai with a conspicuous mound which I saw from a distance. It bears now no other name than Tell, which you may translate 'heap;' and as for 'desolation,' it remains complete unto this day. No doubt traces still remain, could we but find them, of that great heap of stones which Joshua raised over the carcass of Ai's hapless king."—[*The Land and the Book.*]

Verses 14—17.—The Conflict of Truth and Error.

It should be borne in mind that this was a religious war. The men who invaded Canaan were the soldiers of the God of truth, and their enemies were fighting, not only for their own territory and their homes, but in support of a cruel and debasing system of idolatry.

In the conflict between truth and error, if we would prove that we are contending on the side of truth:—

**I. We need something more than zeal.** The King of Ai could rise up early, as well as Joshua, and the men of the city were equally on the alert, to haste with their leader to the battle. One of the arguments, if it be worthy of the name, which we still hear urged on behalf of certain supporters of error is this plea of zeal: "See," we are told, "how earnest these people are, and how cold and dead are the men who oppose them." As if the men who made fires for the martyrs were not zealous! As if Bonner were not zealous in burning

the Bible! As if he who "goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," went about idly, and was indifferent concerning his prey! No true soldier of the cross will be "cold and dead;" but he who relies on zeal as sufficient to prove that he is on the Lord's side, must be prepared to adopt into his brotherhood at least Mahomet, the persecutors of the early Church, many of the worst of the popes, and not a few atheists. **II. We need something more than bravery.** While we wonder to see these idolaters so infatuated and blind, we cannot but admire their courage. Though they were visibly outnumbered in the proportion of at least six to one, without counting the ambush of their enemies, they shewed no hesitation in commencing the attack, and in subsequently pursuing after the Israelites. For all that, they were idolaters. **III. We need something more than wise precaution.** The expression, "at a time appointed" (verse 14), shews that the sortie of the idolaters was not wholly reckless. Keil is of opinion that the original word may be rendered in one of three ways: as in the text, "*at the signal agreed upon*," or, "*at the place appointed.*" Of these three translations, he prefers the last as the most appropriate, and then adds: "Evidently before making the sally, the king had arranged with the army, upon what point the attack should be concentrated." Error has often shewn much organisation and discipline in its attacks on truth. The words in which unbelief assaults faith are not all reckless rodomontade; but intelligence, and the systematic use of it, are not necessarily truth. **IV. We need something more than the general support of those who are about us.** "There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel," etc. (verse 17). After a long argument, John Wesley is reported to have said, with a view to terminate the discussion by the force of his dominating will: "You may say what you will, sister, the voice of the people *is* the voice of God." "Yes, John," she quietly replied, "it cried, Crucify Him, crucify Him." Men contend against each other in parties, in families, clans, nations; and oftener than not sides are taken, utterly irrespective of truth and right. The accident of our cradles and our nurseries has more to do with our creeds than many suspect. It is very strange to think how many children of episcopalians grow up to believe in the Church of England, Wesleyans in Methodism, Baptists in immersion, Calvinists in Calvinism, Russians in the Greek Church, Arabs and Turks in Mahometanism, and so on, through endless divisions of our race; and almost every believer is prepared to contend earnestly for his own view of truth, as "the faith once delivered to the saints." Baal and Ashtoreth against the living God; that was the state of the case in this war in Canaan, and while each Canaanite found truth in his idolatry, each Israelite found it only in Jehovah. The line of religious faith was co-extensive and identical with the line dividing the nations. In deciding upon the true religion, it made all the difference whether a man was descended from Ham or Shem, from Canaan or Abram; whether he was left to grow up under the traditions which had accumulated upon a sinful people, or trained by the God of heaven and the pious care of His servants; whether he had a home and a country to defend, or a home and a country to win. When we rely on the unanimity of those about us to assure ourselves that we are on the side of truth, we forget the silent sarcasm of history. In a matter like this, we want light to guide us, not numbers, and light only comes to the obedient. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." No more arbitrary, and no less true, is that word of the former Testament, "I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." One lifetime is not long enough to grow into the doctrine of truth; it is altogether too short to grow out of a creed that is erroneous. **V. We need something more than temporary success.** The servants of truth may "make as if they are beaten," or, for a season, they may be really beaten; no seeming or even actual prosperity, which is but for a little while, can sufficiently prove that they

who pursue are fighting on the side of truth. We need some better guarantee than occasional and momentary triumphs. The same hour that finds us pursuing, may, ere it close, find us fleeing. Happy is that man whose God assures him that his last enemy shall be destroyed, and whose brethren in faith have by myriads quitted life crying, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Verses 18, 19, 25, 26.—THE OUTSTRETCHED SPEAR.

1. The stretching out of human hands towards God is a recognised form of supplicating for mercy. (Cf. Psalms xliv. 20; lxviii. 31; lxxxviii. 9, etc.) 2. The stretching out of the hand of God towards men is indicative of His anger. (Cf. Prov. i. 24; Isa. v. 25; ix. 12, 17, 21; Ezek. xvi. 27.) 3. The stretching out of human hands towards things, or men, at the command of God, is also indicative of Divine anger. This, indeed, is the sign for the *immediate* exercise of Divine power in some judgment. Cf. Ex. vii. 19, and repeatedly in the narrative of the ten plagues, in the chapters following. See, also, 1 Chron. xxi. 16, where it is said that the sword of the angel was "stretched out over Jerusalem. Thus, the conclusion of several of the earlier commentators that there was "nothing figurative" in the outstretched spear of Joshua, appears to be against the evidence.

**I. The Lord's direct encouragement and help of His servants in the time of their most urgent necessity.** In these days of calmer thought, and of determinate rejection of superstition, we are little able to estimate the depression and fear which, probably, at this time, distressed the army of Israel. True, their numbers were greatly augmented since their former defeat, but they could not forget they had been beaten. The Israelites had only been forty years away from the idolatrous superstitions of Egypt; they were even now in a country where the inhabitants believed that the gods who had, as they thought, controlled the issue in the first battle of Ai, would no less ordain a similar issue now. To this should be added a recollection of the natural impressibility of the oriental mind. We may measure the depression of the Israelites, at this time, by the absurd and exultant confidence of the Aiites: by so much as the latter were foolishly assured, by so much were the Israelites inclined to fear. We may measure the fear of the Israelites, not less, by the encouragement of Jehovah. The promise of verse 1 is here repeated, in the very midst of the engagement. God times His help and comfort to His servants' wants, and makes the measure of it proportionate to His servants' necessities. Scripture has many instances of such direct interposition. It was thus in the cases of Hagar, of Elijah, of Peter when in prison; of Paul and Silas in the jail at Philippi; of Paul in the castle of Antonia at Jerusalem (Acts xxiii. 11), and of the same apostle on the sea of Adria (Acts xxvii. 23, 24). Is there anything to represent such help and encouragement of the Lord's people now? Surely there is. These instances are not symbols of nothing; they tell us of a heart that never changes, and of a hand, which though it now remains invisible, can always find its own way to bring relief to such as fear God. **II. The Lord's adoption of such of His servants' methods as are not out of harmony with Divine principles.** "The Lord said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear," etc. And no sooner was Joshua's spear thus stretched out towards Ai, and the signal transmitted, perhaps by watchers, to the ambush far away, than the ambush arose quickly, and entered the city, and set part of it on fire. The stretching out of the spear was evidently a prearranged signal; it was manifestly Joshua's preconcerted sign to the ambush, and God does but adopt His servant's plan, and make it His own way. 1. *God's methods for human service are not arbitrary.* Much is left to the judgment of men, even in the exalted mission of doing His work. God never crosses our way for the sake of crossing it. 2. *God frequently adopts human methods of service.* He adopted the way of James in preaching against a faith which lacked works, and Paul's manner of preaching against works

which did not spring from faith. Peter, fastening his eyes on the lame man, lying at the gate Beautiful, said: "Look on us. In the name of Jesus Christ of of Nazareth, rise up and walk." God adopted that method. Paul, looking upon the cripple of Lystra, did not use Peter's formula at all; he "said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet." And this cripple, also, "leaped and walked." God honoured that method. At Ephesus Paul permitted "handkerchiefs or aprons" to be carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases departed from them. God made that way His own also. At Troas, Eutychus fell down, and was taken up dead. To him "Paul went down, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. . . . . And they brought the young man alive." God adopted that method too. Peter, in a similar case, following, perhaps half unconsciously, the well-remembered example of the Saviour, put every one out of the room. His way, with the dead, was to work alone with his God. And so, being there in company with the corpse only, he "kneeled down and prayed; and turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise: and she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up." God recognised this way as a good way no less than the other, but not more than the other. His way is to give our individuality perfect liberty. So long as our hearts are right, He has little concern as to our particular manner of working. The Divine way is not to tie us down to set forms of service, but to honour always the work of those who are endeavouring to bless men, and who therein seek to exalt God. 8. *God adopts human methods of serving Him only within certain limits.* He never recognises by His help methods which traverse Divine principles, and which seek other ways than the way of holiness. The seven sons of Sceva had a great ambition. They wanted to cast out devils, and thus exalt themselves. So they found their man, and cried, "We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth." The formula was good enough, but the spirit was altogether wrong; and "they fled out of that house naked and wounded." The devil is never driven out of another man by a devil in ourselves. That would be "dividing the house against itself." He who would succeed against that which is devilish must work together with God. Simon Magus wished to purchase with money the power of conferring the Holy Ghost. To the apostles the idea was revolting, and the thought of the man's heart was even more obnoxious to God. This was not the Divine method at all. When our way is in harmony with truth, it is ever in harmony with heaven. Within the circle of holiness our methods may take any form whatever, and God will approve them; without that circle, everything which we do is offensive in His sight. **III. The Lord's encouragement of His servants supplemented by their remembrance of the Lord's former mercies.** "Joshua drew not his hand back" so long as an enemy remained (verse 26). The leader of Israel could not but have thought of that other battle, forty years before, when the tide of victory had ebbed and flowed in response to the falling and uplifted hands of Moses. It is of no account to say that the spear of Joshua had no such relation to success as the uplifted hands of his forerunner; no one can pronounce on that either way. It is enough to feel that Joshua must have recalled the scene at Rephidim, and then to observe that he kept his own hand persistently steady. On that occasion he had personally led in the conflict, and he would well enough remember how fitfully and sternly the battle had gone. Thinking of that, he keeps his spear steadily outstretched till the last enemy has fallen. God's present encouragements were great; to the strength given by them, Joshua would add the memory of the mercies of bygone years. We need often special help from on high; God would ever have us use, also, every other aid which our experience affords. In every conflict of the present, we shall do well to recall His goodness in the past.

Verse 20.—The Crisis of the Wicked.

Sooner or later, all those who oppose themselves against God must prepare to meet their God. When the Lord meets the wicked in conflict and judgment:—

**I. The wicked will see all their earthly hopes destroyed.** "The smoke of the city ascended up to heaven." These idolaters saw:—1. That their houses were destroyed. 2. That all their property and gains were lost. 3. That every earthly hope was cut off. 4. That they had no hope for the life to come.

**II. The wicked will have no strength to resist.** These men of Ai saw how completely they were at the mercy of their foes, and they became powerless.

**III. The wicked will have no direction in which to flee.** The idolaters "had no hand" on which they could escape. "The people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon their pursuers." (Compare Luke xxiii. 30, Rev. vi. 16, 17, with Isa. viii. 14, 15; xxviii. 16, 17; 1 Peter ii. 6.)

Verses 26—29.—Victory in the Lord's War.

**I. The way to victory is through persistent conflict.** Our hand is not to be drawn back while a single enemy remains (verse 26).

**II. The rewards of victory are a Divine gift.** God took Jericho, as the firstfruits, to shew that all the spoils belonged to Himself; here, according to his word, He gives the earnest of the future possession as from Himself (verse 27).

**III. The object of victory is to blot out sin from the earth.** The very cities of this idolatrous land were to be purified by fire (verse 28).

**IV. The doom which follows victory will be according to the desert.** The king, who had ruled over these idolaters, and been a leader among transgressors, is singled out for the emphasis of the curse (cf. Deut. xxi. 23), and is thus made *cherem* even beyond his brethren.

**V. The memorials of victory should be suitable to its mercies.** The heap of stones was the customary monument of the times, and, usually, one that long remained to bear its witness.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.*—*Verses* 30, 31.

The March to Ebal and Gerizim.

Two omissions in the history of the events which must have immediately succeeded the fall of Ai make the introduction of the narrative which closes this chapter appear unusually abrupt. No account is given of the march of the people who captured Ai to the neighbourhood of Shechem, and nothing is said of the removal of the camp from the Gilgal near Jericho to that other Gilgal which was evidently situated near the mountains Ebal and Gerizim. (Cf. Deut. xi. 30; Gen. xii, 6.) These omissions are not a sufficient reason for treating the passage before us as misplaced, much less for regarding it as an interpolation by a later hand. It would be as reasonable to treat the order of the first chapter of Genesis as incorrect, because of the long space of time and series of events probably passed over between its several paragraphs. Omissions are not, essentially, proofs of contradictions. Keil and Kitto have shewn with much care that the Gilgal mentioned in chapter ix. 6, should be taken as identical with the Gilgal named in Deut. xi. 30. The author of Lange's commentary on the text, after speaking much too flippantly on what he terms "Keil's prejudiced opposition to all which is called criticism," makes the somewhat reckless remark: If the Gilgal of chapter ix. 6 were another place of that name in the region of Shechem, "the author would *certainly* in some way have given an intimation of the fact. As he omits this, the whole connection points to Gilgal near Jericho, and Joshua is in the southern part, not in central Palestine." Keil, at least, has respected his readers sufficiently to give weighty reasons for his opinion, while his critic has done little more than give

a vehement opinion for his reasons. With the passages referred to in Deuteronomy and Genesis before us, and with several other parts of Scripture, in the historical books, which suppose a second Gilgal somewhere in this locality, the omission notwithstanding, we can only conclude that the entire camp had, at this time, removed from Gilgal near Jericho to Gilgal, "beside the plains of Moreh," near Shechem.

At the lowest estimate, two or three days must have intervened between the fall of Ai and the gathering at Ebal. Keil, who thinks that Ai must be sought as far north as where Turmus Aya now stands, makes the distance from Ai to Shechem only about thirteen miles; Hävernick states it at twenty miles; while others, who conclude that Ai was farther south, reckon that the thirty thousand men employed to destroy this city must have marched more than thirty miles ere they came to the place where Moses had commanded them to celebrate this solemn religious service. At least two or three days must have passed, then, ere even this part of the host of Israel could have arrived at their destination; nearly a week might have elapsed ere the entire camp was removed from the plains of Jericho, and pitched in the Gilgal which was not far from Shechem. Of these intervening days the history gives no account. The record does not claim to be a diary; it is merely the story of the more conspicuous events, and as such, an occasional abruptness of transition is no sufficient reason for impugning the correctness of the narrative. True manliness judges books as it judges men; it holds them to be innocent till they are proved guilty, and does not, under the plea of superior discernment, hasten to proclaim falsity merely on the ground of obscurity. The Bible, of all books, might be supposed to have established its claim to this fairness of criticism, especially at the hands of its avowedly Christian interpreters.

### The Altar on Mount Ebal.—Verses 30, 31.

The erection of this altar was the commencement of a service in which the covenant was once more renewed. This may be gathered from such passages as Deut. xxix., where the blessings and the curses to be pronounced at Shechem are repeatedly spoken of as words of the Divine covenant. 1. *The renewal of the covenant by Israel was very varied in form.* At Gilgal, near Jericho, it was renewed by the rite of circumcision, and also by the celebration of the passover; at Mount Ebal the ceremony of renewal was entirely different. In Exod. xxxi. 16, the observance of the sabbath is spoken of as a perpetual covenant. Every act of sincere worship should be regarded as a renewal of covenant with God. Every true act of worship now is a fresh acceptance of Jesus Christ. 2. *Whatever outward variation there might be in services designed to renew the covenant, sincerity was an absolute essential.* Nothing short of a sincere heart would enable the Israelites to keep the terms of the covenant, and without keeping these, all rites would be useless. Circumcision and the passover might be observed, as at Gilgal, near Jericho; blessings and curses might be solemnly repeated, as at Shechem; all rites would be fruitless to prevent ruin, if obedience were wanting, and no man could be truly obedient who lacked sincerity.

In this erection of the altar unto the Lord God in Mount Ebal, four things invite consideration. **I. The time of building the altar.** To offer this service to the Lord, the people had to break away from their military pursuits at a time which seemed to imperatively require their presence in the field. The lesson of waiting on the Lord, taught so significantly at Jericho, is even more significantly repeated here. Good generalship would have led Joshua to say, "Let us follow up our successes;" his piety helped him to determine that the duties owing to the Lord were of much more importance than the pursuit of his disheartened enemies. 1. *The spirit of true worship places God before all else.* Old Testament or New Testament, it matters not; he who serves God indeed is ever ready to say, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all other things shall be added unto you." A child, who

has really a child's heart, can place nothing on earth before his father and mother. He who is a child of God indeed, and who to filial love adds holy reverence, will need no teaching from without to enable him to exalt the name of the Lord above every other name which is named among men. 2. *The spirit of true worship is also a spirit of obedience.* Moses had commanded the elders of Israel to attend to this service on Ebal as soon as they should enter into the land (Deut. xxvii. 2). Moses had spoken in the name of Jehovah, and at the earliest possible moment Joshua hastens to perform the word of the Lord. True fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, does not consist in the use of irreverent and amatory phrases. One unctuous man may catch all these from another; he may even multiply the terms and sweeten the tones, and yet be little more than a kind of religious parrot. In some men, ardent love naturally chooses terms of endearment, even when approaching God; when it does so lawfully, it ever chooses them out of the heart, and not from the memory. Such a spirit is above criticism to every hearer who also loves God. Yet it should be remembered that only he who is devoutly obedient gives sufficient evidence of ardent love. Love that is really sincere is never so much in earnest as when it cries, "I will run in the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart." He whose fellowship with God was absolutely perfect, made that perfect communion manifest in the obedience which said, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart." 3. *The spirit of true worship has regard to the necessity of sacrifice.* Breaking away from their warfare to worship God, these men began by building an altar. (*a*) He who worships in spirit and in truth must recognise both the need and the fact of forgiveness. (*b*) He who worships in spirit and in truth rejoices not only in the sacrifice through which he is forgiven, but in the self-sacrifice which proclaims his own love and gratitude. The Israelites in this act of worship seemed sacrificing their own worldly interest by not following up their victories promptly. The really devout will gladly forego and forget worldly gain, when called upon to render homage to the name of Him from whom they receive all that is worth possessing. Christ's cross, seen aright, will provoke us to take up ours. 4. *The spirit of true worship not only adores God, but trusts Him.* There seemed some danger in advancing, like this, for twenty or thirty miles northward, into a part of the country which had not yet submitted, and in encamping there for some days to offer solemn religious service to Jehovah. But "The people that do know the Lord shall be strong, and do exploits." The Israelites, during the last forty years, had learned to know that they had no reason to fear anything which God commanded. The way from the Red Sea to Ai was one continued reiteration of their absolute safety in doing the will of God. To follow the Divine leading even through the sea was to have a wall on either hand, standing sufficiently long to shield them, and falling soon enough to destroy their enemies; to disobey the Divine command was to be in danger and to suffer defeat, even before the insignificant forces of the king of Ai. Thus, the spirit of trust must still enter into the spirit of worship. He only can praise aright who rests in the Lord. **II. The situation of the altar.** Joshua built it "in Mount Ebal." It was built there by the Divine commandment. 1. *Geographically, the site of this altar was very significant.* Crosby has said of Ebal and Gerizim: "If you draw a line from the latitude of Sidon to the latitude of the supposed Kadesh-barnea, these mountains are exactly at the half-way point. If you draw another line from the Mediterranean Sea to the top of the Gilead range, again these mountains are at the half-way point. Thus the spot taken for this grand ceremony was exactly in the centre of the new country of the tribes." By God's commandment, therefore, this altar was to be erected in the very centre of the land. As far as possible, it was to be accessible to all the people. This neighbourhood became a chief place for the worship of the people during several succeeding centuries. It was probably at the Gilgal near to Ebal, and subsequently at Shiloh, also in the neighbourhood,

that the Ark of the covenant was so long deposited. Hosea and Amos make repeated references to the sacrifices offered at Gilgal, even after the nation had lapsed into a general idolatry. The woman of Samaria said, as late as the time of our Lord, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain." The erection of this altar on Ebal, the inscription of the law on the stones there, and the subsequent religious history of the neighbourhood all point to these mountains in the middle of Palestine as the centre of worship during several centuries. In the minds of one section of the people, at least, even after the return from Babylon, the strength of the traditions which gathered about Gerizim successfully competed with the later glories of Jerusalem. Designedly, God made the centre of Israel's early worship in the very midst of the land. (*a*) God has placed the cross within the reach of all men, It is accessible to the remotest of the nations. Christ said, "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." This very altar of Ebal seems to suggest coming days, when, although the name of the Lord should be made known through all the earth, to draw near to Him should still be within the power of every worshipper. (*b*) The cross is equally within the reach of all classes. Sick or dying, rich or poor, with a character or without, somewhat moral or very sinful, the grace which built for men the world's altar on Calvary built it well within reach of them all. (*c*) The one cross of Jesus Christ is enough for all the world. This one altar on Mount Ebal, for a long time, was deemed sufficient for the millions of Israel, and the anger of the home tribes when, six or seven years later, the two and a half tribes seemed to have erected a second altar for sacrifices (chap. xxii.) is not a little significant. Some people often talk of the sufficiency of the atonement in a very commercial way. Figures which the Holy Spirit has used to represent Christ's work as precious, and the provisions of the Gospel as a rich banquet, are made to apply, not to intrinsic excellence, as they were intended, but to a definite purchasing or feasting power. Christ's blood is "a price," and forthwith we are given to understand that it will redeem a given number; or the Gospel is "a feast," and its provisions are straightway contemplated as affording a sufficiency for believers. The Saviour's death, *in its extent*, has, from the very nature of the case, absolutely no relation to numbers. A price may represent the preciousness of His shed blood, but not its definite purchasing power; a feast may faintly illustrate the richness of the provisions of the Gospel, but it is not meant to signify that the Gospel will feed so many, and no more. In a large and lofty room, lighted by what is termed a sunlight, placed near the ceiling, it would be foolish to say, "When the room is full, and two hundred men are seated within it, reading, the gas must be turned on full, but when only one person is so engaged in the room, the light may be reduced in the proportion of two hundred to one." To see clearly, one man would need as much light as a room full. If fifty millions of people were suddenly to die, and pass away from the earth in one day, God would not turn the sun down to correspond with the world's reduced number of inhabitants. Adam needed as much sunlight when he was on earth alone, as all the teeming millions of his descendants need now. Light which is not very local, is irrespective of numbers. The cross is not only light, it is light from heaven; and in order to see the way to heaven one sinner needs as much light as all the world. Men want to see clearly enough to be able to hope and to believe. They want light on God's mercy, on His love, and on His willingness to pardon sin. In response to that want, Christ answers, "I am the light of the world." Any single man needs all of Christ's light in order to believe firmly, and all men together need no more. One sinner could have done with nothing less than Calvary; all the world combined would find this one altar sufficient for the wants of its thronging multitudes. 2. *Historically, the site of this altar on Ebal was interesting and stimulating.* It was here that Abraham received the first promise of Canaan, and just at the foot of the mountain he built his first altar in the land. Here the hope of possessing this inheritance had first dawned. It was well that the children who were taking possession

should build their altar where their father Abraham had built his, and where he at first received and believed the promise. The cross of Christ should be dear to us in a similar light. (*a*) Our fathers were saved here. (*b*) Here hope first dawned on us. (*c*) When we go to take possession of the inheritance in which we now believe, we shall still, in spirit, gather round the cross. 3. *Symbolically, the place where this altar was built was very suggestive.* It was built on Ebal, not on Gerizim. On the place where the Israelites were bidden to put the curse, there God commanded them to erect the altar (cf. Deut. xi. 29). However strongly modern criticism may reject any spiritual meaning in this arrangement, such a meaning could hardly escape the attention of a people to whom God was revealing His will systematically through types and symbols. Where the curse was put on account of sin, there must the altar be placed in view of forgiveness. **III. The materials of the altar.** These were to be "of whole stones," over which no man hath lift up any iron (cf. Exod. xx. 25). The leading idea in this command seems to be, not "that the altar might retain both the appearance and nature of earth," but that men must not presume to attempt to finish God's work, and to perfect for themselves a way of approach to His presence. The unhewn stones of the altar were to stand there as fashioned by nature, and were to "cry out against" every offerer who thought that he could do anything to make his own offering worthy of God, or that he could adorn by his own works anything which must, after all, depend entirely upon God's grace. **IV. The offerings of the altar.** 1. *The burnt-offerings were offered on account of sin.* Sin must be put away before any other service can be acceptable to God. 2. *The peace-offerings were expressive of thanksgiving and fellowship.* Keil says, "By the repast associated with the thank-offering (Deut. xxvii. 7), the communion of life with God, a communion both of house and table, was once more restored." Thus does this ancient altar of the Old Testament teach us the same principles and truths as are set before us in the Gospel. "Coming events cast their shadows before," said Campbell, and thus did this service at Mount Ebal project before men a spiritual outline of the coming cross.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verse 31.—The Altar of Whole Stones.**

**I. The materials connected with sacrifice to God were all prepared by God.** Everything which had to do with offerings for sin, must be of Divine origin and formation. Men could only take of God's own, and render it back to God again. 1. *The stones of which the altar was built must be of Divine workmanship.* The very altar on which the offerings were consumed, was to have its stones fashioned by the hand of Jehovah. 2. *Not only the altar, but the sacrifices also, were to be of the workmanship of the Lord.* Only that which had possessed life, could be presented as an offering for man's transgression. "Without shedding of blood is no remission." No man could create life; therefore, in part, living things were to be killed for sacrifices. Human hands must not hew into shape the stones of the altar, and they could not make the necessary offering. This is no accidental concurrence which thus points out mystically, and yet so clearly, that the way to the forgiveness of sins could be opened only by Jehovah. It is God's Old Testament way of saying of Himself: "Neither is there salvation in any other." **II. The altar of sacrifice, erected to the Lord, could not in anything be perfected or beautified by men.** Any tool lifted up upon it, even by the most skilful artificer, would pollute it. We are not to presume to work *after God*, in order that the thing on which we labour shall be more acceptable in His sight. Ruskin, in his "Modern Painters," has admirably expounded this, from the artist's point of view. He says: "Our best finishing is but coarse and blundering work after all. We may smooth and soften and sharpen till we are sick at heart; but take a good magnifying glass

to our miracle of skill, and the invisible edge is a jagged saw, and the silky thread a rugged cable, and the soft surface a granite desert. Let all the ingenuity and all the art of the human race be brought to bear upon the attainment of the utmost possible finish, and they could not do what is done in the foot of a fly, or the film of a bubble. God alone can finish; and the more intelligent the human mind becomes, the more the infiniteness of interval is felt between human and Divine work in this respect. . . . . But more than this: the fact is, that in multitudes of instances, instead of gaining greater fineness of finish by our work, we are only destroying the fine finish of Nature, and substituting coarseness and imperfection. For instance, when a rock of any kind has lain for some time exposed to the weather, Nature finishes it in her own way; first, she takes wonderful pains about its forms, sculpturing it into exquisite variety of dint and dimple, and rounding or hollowing it into contours, which for fineness no human hand can follow; then she colours it; and every one of her touches of colour, instead of being a powder mixed with oil, is a minute forest of living trees, glorious in strength and beauty, and concealing wonders of structure, which in all probability are mysteries even to the eyes of angels. Man comes and digs up this finished and marvellous piece of work, which in his ignorance he calls a 'rough stone.' He proceeds to finish it in *his* fashion, that is to split it in two, rend it into ragged blocks, and, finally, to chisel its surface into a large number of lumps and knots, all equally shapeless, colourless, deathful, and frightful. And the block, thus disfigured, he calls 'finished,' and proceeds to build therewith, and thinks himself great, forsooth, and an intelligent animal. Whereas, all that he has really done is, to destroy with utter ravage a piece of Divine art, which, under the laws appointed by the Deity to regulate His work in this world, it must take good twenty years to produce the like again. . . . . I do not say that stone must not be cut; it needs to be cut for certain uses; only I say that the cutting is not 'finishing,' but *un*finishing it; and that so far as the mere fact of chiselling goes, the stone is ruined by the human touch. It is with it as with the stones of the Jewish altar: 'If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.' In like manner, a tree is a finished thing. But a plank, though ever so polished, is not. We need stones and planks as we need food; but we no more bestow an additional admirableness upon stone in hewing it, or upon a tree in sawing it, than upon an animal in killing it." (Vol. iii., pp. 117-8.) The more educated a man's sight becomes, to perceive artistic beauty, the more will he feel the truth of these statements. That truth must have infinitely more grace to Him who made the world, and who beholds clearly the most minute forms of beauty which His hand has fashioned, which lie utterly hidden from our grosser perception. To Him, indeed, our finishing must seem but poor rough work. But this is only half the truth, and the least valuable half, which God would have us read in His command touching the stones of the altar. If there were nothing more to be considered, God would bear to look upon our poor misshapen work *in material things:* in His fatherly pity He might even be interested in our uncouth forms, even as we are interested in the awkward letters in our child's first copies, or in the result of his early attempts to fashion a toy. This command to the Jews was not merely to prevent uncouth material work, but to keep them from unsightly and harmful spiritual work. God would have men see, from the first, that the way of approach to His presence could never be through human working. The moral embellishments would fail even more grotesquely than the material. Even the perfect work of a heart and a life could only make an obedient servant, who had done that which it was his duty to do; to make a son, human work must give place to Divine work, to Divine gifts, and to Divine grace. If they were such, what, in the light of this commandment, are we to think of the so-called altars of some modern worshippers? What becomes of the ornate forms and the gaudy embellishments in the light of this

Divine revelation of God's will? Still worse, What is to be said of the principle which accepts all this as affording some easier access to His presence who said, "If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it"? We have but one altar, and that is the cross; we have but one sacrifice, and that is Jesus Christ, who was offered once for all: henceforth, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." To erect any other altar is to ignore Calvary; to bring any other sacrifice is to reject the Saviour as insufficient. **III. The altar which was so jealously guarded by God's commandments, was thus guarded to preserve a pure conception of human worship.** The Divine thought was not concerned with human architecture, but with men's hearts. The stones were of small account to God, hewn or unhewn; it was of infinite importance that in coming to Him men should not be led astray. Jesus Christ, also, took this same care to preserve pure the way of human worship. Once at the beginning, and again at the end of His ministry, He swept from the temple the pollutions of men. He made a scourge of small cords, and with scathing words, and, it may be, sharp blows, He drove out the men who were corrupting the idea of worship in its fundamental principles. Christ was angry; and some weak-minded sceptics have sneered at the anger. Divine love had no alternative but to be divinely angry at a scene like that. What if some demon in human form, moved by the thought of gain, were to go about a large city, breaking fire escapes, or cutting holes in the hose of fire engines? What if he should secretly unnail boards in ships' boats, damage anchor chains, file nearly through the wire rope holding the cage in which the miners descend to their work, and out of the death of many human victims seek to make his own fortune? Who with any manhood could be other than angry at work like this? Very degraded beings might contemplate with little feeling the purpose of the wretched man who lately proposed to blow a passenger ship to pieces with dynamite, which was to be exploded by clockwork when the vessel had been eight days at sea, in order that he might secure a sum of money on a false insurance; every one with common humanity was horrified and indignant at the tidings which revealed a brutality so dreadful and devilish. Goodness cannot but be moved to wrath at some things which this world shews. It was Christ's dear pity which burst out into such blessed anger in the temple. He was indignant for us. Men were corrupting the streams of life. They were destroying the one way of salvation. They were polluting the idea of worship, and making the very temple of God an occasion for scorn and contempt. Similarly, the seething woes which are recorded in Matt. xxiii., were uttered by Christ against the Pharisees because they "shut up the kingdom of heaven against men." So this altar, to these ancient people, was the divinely appointed way to the presence and mercy of God. God would have the way kept open. It was of little moment to Him what forms or finish might be presented by the stones of the altar; but the conception which His people had of worshipping Him was of profound importance. It was because of this that the Divine word laid so strong an emphasis on what, taken in an external sense, might seem comparatively trivial. The one way of salvation was by sacrifice, and men's thoughts of that sacrifice must be kept free from pollution.

EBAL, GERIZIM, AND SHECHEM.

"Mount Ebal, where Joshua erected the altar, was situated on the north of Sichem, opposite to Mount Gerizim, which was on the south side of the same town. These mountains rise with rocky cliffs almost perpendicularly to the height of about 800 feet on every side, from a broad valley of 3000 paces long, and from 500 to 1000 in width, in which the city of Sichem (Nabulus) is built. Most of the early travellers describe Gerizim as fruitful and picturesque, Ebal, on the contrary, as a rugged and barren mass of rock; but according to *Robinson* the sides of both, as seen from the valley, are equally bleak and barren, the only difference being that there is a small cleft in the

side of Gerizim, towards the western end of the city of Nabulus, which is certainly full of springs and trees. With this exception the mountains are both barren, having only two or three olive trees scattered about."—[*Keil.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 32—35.

### The Proclamation of the Word of God.

No sooner had the altar been erected, than Joshua proceeded to set up other stones close by, plastering them over with cement, and then, ere the cement dried, "he wrote there" upon it, and thus "upon the stones, a copy of the law of Moses." Judging by verse 34, by the natural meaning of Deut. xxvii. 3, 8, and by the improbability that all of "the second law" would be written in this manner, it seems likely that only the blessings and the cursings were written on the plaster. The portion of Scripture which has been called the second law—Deut. iv. 44, to xxvi. 19—contains no less than 538 verses, most of them being of unusual length. The law was to be written upon the stones "very plainly." It is obvious that the preparation of a sufficient number of superficial feet of stone to receive a record of such length must in itself be a work of considerable time. It is not likely that many of the Israelites could take part in the work of inscription, which would be much more tedious. There is no evidence that this visit to Ebal was prolonged beyond a few days; indeed, the history supposes the contrary. We therefore conclude that the law written on the stones was simply that epitome of its principles and spirit contained in the blessings and curses. **I. The altar of the Lord and the word of the Lord go together.** Neither is sufficient without the other. 1. *The cross of Christ would be insufficient without the Scriptures.* We need the Scriptures to assure us that He who died upon Calvary is indeed the Christ of God and the Saviour of the world. Some people speak lightly of doctrine. It has been said, "Give us facts; if the facts are against the doctrines, so much the worse for the doctrines; let the doctrines take care of themselves." As if the facts of Scripture could be more than other facts without the doctrines which illuminate the facts, and which make them admissible. Take the fact of the three crosses on Calvary, and what is one cross more than another, without the doctrine which tells us that He who hangs between the thieves is none other than the Son of God? Faith in Him cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. 2. *The Scriptures would be insufficient without the cross.* They would but reveal the surrounding darkness. They would but tell us of sin from which there would be no escape. The Bible, to be faithful, must still say, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight;" but without the sacrifice of Christ, it could never enable us to read, "There is therefore now no condemnation." 3. *Standing together, the cross and the Scriptures reveal salvation clearly.* Taken separately, the one is incomprehensible, and the other a revelation which leads to despair; taken together, they blend to shed forth a light by which every repentant man and woman may see the King in His beauty, and behold, as his own ultimate home and country, the land which is very far off. **II. The word of the Lord is not only recorded, but recorded in a plain and an enduring manner.** 1. *These words were to be written so that there should be no difficulty in reading them.* Moses commanded Joshua to write all the words "very plainly" (Deut. xxvii. 8). Such, also, was the command of the Lord to Habakkuk: "Write the vision, and make it plain upon the tables, that he may run that readeth it." Such is the character of the Bible as a whole. Its message is so clear that he who reads, whether of wrath or mercy, may well run from the one and to the other. 2. *These words were to be written in a manner which would preserve them for a long period.* (Cf. the quotation from 'The Land and the Book,' following this outline.) In a marvello

way, God has likewise preserved to us the records of the life of Christ and the epistles of the apostles. Owing to the long-continued dominance of the Greek power after the conquests of Alexander, the Greek language, at the time of Christ, was known almost throughout the civilised world. The Hebrew language had been the granary in which the seed of Divine truth had hitherto been carefully preserved; in the days of Christ, the Greek tongue became the machine by which the good seed was distributed, in many thousand furrows, to the very ends of the civilised earth. The Gospel for the Gentiles being ready, the language suited to spread it abroad was ready also. The Gospel for all nations was set down in a language so rich in literature that it would never die,—a language so necessary to the learned of all countries in the future, that the foremost men of every land throughout time would be certain to learn and know the tongue in which the truths of salvation were written. But while this language was so suitable for the spread of the Gospel, it was no less fitted to preserve the Gospel free from corruption. The Greek power had long ceased to be dominant. The Greek language was fast becoming what we call a "dead language." If it had been a language spoken as widely as the Latin, and having as much vitality, the truths of the Gospel might have been varied by the changes which are always insensibly taking place in a living and spoken tongue. Thus Divine wisdom took this Greek language just where it was living and plastic enough to receive this great addition to its literature, and just where it was dead enough for the use and meaning of words not to be much changed. And what is the consequence? Like the rain-drift of ages ago, which stands written so plainly in the tablets of the stones, that we can tell even the direction of the shower; like the extinct animals, whose footprints, just as they left them, are set down in what is now hard rock; so these words of life from the lips of Jesus and His apostles became fossilised in a language just plastic enough to receive them, and just unused and dead enough to petrify into the unalterable word of truth. It was God's way of lithographing the New Covenant, which no less than the Old was "written and engraven in stones." In Old Testament times, God had the Scriptures laid up in the Ark, or written, as here at Ebal, on stones; in New Testament times, He laid up the Gospel unalterably in a widely known but dying language. **III. The word of the Lord is recorded not only in blessings, but also in cursings.** The word 'curse' is not often used in the New Testament, but it is used; the threatenings of the New Testament, however, are certainly as severe as those of the first dispensation. 1. *God's promises of blessing are very precious.* (Cf. Deut. xxviii. 3—14.) (*a.*) They cover our entire life. (*b.*) They are neither few nor small. 2. *If the blessings are precious, the threatenings are not less necessary.* (*a.*) The noblest motive for serving God is love of Him and of the things which He commands. Too few, it is to be feared, serve in this spirit. (*b.*) God, who "knoweth our frame," permits us to serve Him in view of promised mercies. He plies us with the thought of reward to be gathered both here and hereafter. (*c.*) Divine wisdom has no less recognised the necessity of threatening. Those who will not serve Him in love, or from expectation of reward, His love seeks to awaken by fear. After knowing something of the blessedness of His truth, they may do His will from higher motives; but with many, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." How grateful we should be for this love which thus surrounds us on every side, and which prompts us in every possible manner to seek the way of life and joy. **IV. The word of the Lord is not only impartially written, but should be impartially proclaimed.** When God Himself directs the public service in which the people are to approach Him, He will have the cursings uttered as well as the blessings. 1. *The preaching and reading of God's word is often partial, and one-sided.* Chapters are read because they are pleasant and soothing. Themes are chosen which are inspiring and comforting. Thus, too often, the words of the Lord are subject to an irreverent selection. This is often done almost unconsciously. There may be no desire on the part of a minister to avoid any particular truths, and no con-

sciousness of being unfaithful. Men get perverted by their sympathies. This evil is not merely the error of the pulpit, but also of the pew; for while it is true that a minister will do much to make a congregation what they are, the congregation will generally do much more to make a minister what he is. Time, and freedom from a public position in the service, are always on the side of the congregation. These perverted sympathies should be guarded against. Our strongest sympathies should always be in doing the will of our heavenly Father. Infinite love and wisdom have arranged, far better than we can, the desirable proportion of threatening and promise. 2. *Experience shews that the threatenings of Divine truth have often awakened men to seek Christ, where words of mercy have failed.* President Edwards never uttered kinder words than when he preached his truly awful discourse from the text, "Their feet shall slide in due time." Many in glory now, know how to thank him, and God for him, because of the loving earnestness which moved him to risk even utterances like those, if by any means he might save some. It has been affirmed that this sermon has never been preached without conversions, although spoken several times by the author, and sometimes by others, on account of the remarkable blessing by which it had invariably been followed. **V. The word of the Lord thus written and proclaimed, was written and proclaimed for all the people.** It was read "before all the congregation of Israel." The women were there, for the Bible has no words of help for men, which are not addressed to them also. The little ones were there. They were not too young to hear the word of the Lord, and in the event of the fathers' backsliding, their very children might rise up to reprove them. The strangers were there: proselytes, it may be, like Rahab and her family. How this proclamation of the word of the Lord to everybody rebukes the practice of the Romish Church in withholding, as far as possible, the Bible from the people. The elders and the little ones, the princes and the poor, the judges and the judged, were all to listen to, and might all read, these words of the Lord God. **VI. The word of the Lord to all the people was a word to which all the people bore witness, and which, if broken, would, in its turn, witness against them.** 1. *The people testified that this word must be either a blessing or a curse.* Every word of God comes under this description. To the unfaithful God has said, "I will curse your blessings" (Mal. ii. 2), while from all the obedient He removes the curse for ever. The word of the Lord to every hearer now is "a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death." 2. *The people gave their "Amen" to the threatenings as well as to the promises.* Thus even the Old Testament reveals God as preparing to say, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." No man who provokes the curse will find room to complain of its penalty as unjust. The heart of every hearer of God's word now inwardly utters its "Amen" to the truth as it is in Jesus. 3. *The people who thus accepted the word of God, necessarily made the acts of their after life a petition to God* The "Amens" which they had so solemnly uttered were so many interpretations which they themselves agreed should be put to their daily deeds. Henceforth, when a man made or worshipped idols, he was virtually saying to God, "Let the curse be upon me." When he removed his neighbour's landmark, set light by his parents, misled the blind, or perverted judgment, he rendered himself liable to the curse pronounced on Ebal, and his guilty act, read in the light of his "Amen" then, still invoked the curse. The after generations who knew what their fathers had done, and who could not but recognise the justice of the law to which their ancestors had given so solemn a consent, stood in exactly the same position. To know the covenant to which their fathers had agreed, was to become parties to its terms. Thus, all through the dispensation, the daily life of each Israelite was a prayer for blessing, or a prayer for the curse. It is equally so with men now. Every heart hearing the word of God acknowledges its purity, authority, and justice; and for a man to know the word and do it not, "to him it is sin," and each sin invokes the penalty to which the conscience has given its solemn assent.

"The deed ye do is the prayer ye pray:
'Lead us not into temptation, Lord;
Withhold the bread from our babes this day,
To evil we turn us, give evil's reward.'

Over to-day to-morrow bends,
With an answer for each acted prayer;
And woe to him who makes not friends
With the pale hereafter hovering there!"

—*G. S. Burleigh.*

4. *The people who solemnly assented to the word of the Lord, gave a no less solemn witness to its unfailing truth.* The after history of the nation reads like an echo of these utterances on Ebal and Gerizim. That history is the seal and testimony of Time that the Scriptures are what they claim to be,—"a sure word of prophecy."

## OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 30—35.—The Solemn Service at Mount Ebal.

I. **The erection of an altar to the Lord.** "History repeats itself." Abraham's altar (Gen. xii. 6). Jacob's altar (Gen. xxxiii. 18—20).

II. **The writing of the word of the Lord.** This was: 1. By the altar. 2. On the stones. 3. In the centre of the land. The Scriptures are to be accessible to all the people.

III. **The proclamation of the word of the Lord.** This should be: 1. Impartial. 2. Reiterated. 3. Continuous.

IV. **The hearers of the word of the Lord.** These should embrace men: 1. Irrespective of rank and occupation. 2. Irrespective of age. 3. Irrespective of nationality.

Verse 33.—The Divine Idea of Precedence and Honour among Men.

The tribes were to stand "half of them over against Mount Gerizim, and half of them over against Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded." In Deut. xxvii., the arrangement of the tribes is specified, and is declared to be not merely the word of Moses, but the command of Jehovah. The enunciation of the blessings could hardly fail to be esteemed the more honourable work. The very selection of the tribes recognises the blessing as the more, and the cursing as the less honourable part of the service. In this Divine recognition of precedence and honour among men, certain principles of interest and importance are more or less clearly marked:—

1. Nothing preventing, the elder children are preferred before the younger. The list of the tribes chosen to bless begins with Simeon.

2. The youngest of the children take precedence of the man who has forfeited his character. Reuben, although the firstborn, gives place even to Joseph and Benjamin. His lost character was reckoned as a lost birthright (cf. Gen. xxxv. 22; xlix. 4; 1 Chron. v. 1).

3. The children of the legitimate wives are placed before the children of Zilpha and Bilha. Reuben and Zebulun are the only two children of Jacob's wives who are passed by; the former for the reason stated, and the latter as the youngest son of Leah. Dan and Naphtali are probably named before Zebulun, on the ground of seniority. Joseph and Benjamin seem to be chosen for the work of blessing, because, although they were younger than Zebulun, they were the first and second children of the second wife, whereas Zebulun was the sixth child of the first wife.

Ebal and Gerizim.

"Imagine that the range of mountains running north and south was cleft open to its base by some tremendous convulsion of nature, at right angles to its own line of extension, and the broad fissure thus made is the vale of Nablûs as it appears to one coming up the plain of Mukhna from Jerusalem. Mount Ebal is on the north, Gerizim on the south, and the city between. Near the eastern end, the vale is not more than sixty rods

wide; and just there, I suppose, the tribes assembled to hear the 'blessings and cursings' read by the Levites. . . . . This was, beyond question or comparison, the most august assembly the sun has ever shone upon; and I never stand in the narrow plain, with Ebal and Gerizim rising on either hand to the sky, without involuntarily recalling and reproducing the scene. I have shouted to hear the echo, and then fancied how it must have been when the loud-voiced Levites proclaimed from the naked cliffs of Ebal, 'Cursed be the man that maketh any graven image, an abomination unto Jehovah.' And then the tremendous Amen! tenfold louder, from the mighty congregation, rising, and swelling, and re-echoing from Ebal to Gerizim, and from Gerizim to Ebal. 'Amen! even so let him be accursed.' No, there never was an assembly to compare with this. . . . .

"Moses did not order such a Herculean labour as to grave the whole law in marble, but simply to write it *on* or *in* properly prepared cement. In this hot climate, where there is no frost to dissolve the cement, it will continue hard and unbroken for thousands of years. The cement on Solomon's Pools remains in admirable preservation, though exposed to all the vicissitudes of the climate, and with no protection. The cement in the tombs about Sidon is still perfect, and the writing on them entire, though acted upon by the moist, damp air always found in caverns, for perhaps two thousand years. What Joshua did, therefore, when he erected those great stones at Mount Ebal, was merely to write *in* the still soft cement, with a stile, or, more likely, *on* the polished surface, when dry, with red paint, as in ancient tombs. If properly sheltered, and not broken away by violence, they would have remained to this day."—[*The Land and the Book.*]

THE PLACE AND USE OF DIVINE THREATENINGS.

A late writer, with some knowledge of mountain vegetation, has said: "While the trees and flowers that clothe the fields of nature are dispersed over the wide surface of the earth, there are mountain regions lying within the tropics, where, in the course of a single day, the traveller finds every vegetable form peculiar to every line of latitude between the equator and the poles. These are all laid out in regular arrangement. Leaving the palms which cover the mountain's foot, the traveller ascends into the region of the olive; from thence he rises to a more temperate climate, where vines festoon the trees, or trail their limbs along the naked rock; still mounting, he reaches a belt of oaks and chestnuts; from that he passes to rugged heights, shaggy with the hardy pine; by-and-by the trees are dwarfed into bushes; rising higher, his foot presses a soft carpet of lowly mosses; till, climbing the rocks where only lichens live, he leaves all life below, and now, shivering in the cold, panting in the thin air for breath, he stands on those dreary elevations, where eternal winter sits on a throne of snow, and, waving her icy sceptre, says to vegetation, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.'"

In Bible scenery, to the anxious spiritual climber, the order of the landscape often lies the other way. His spiritual experience begins amid stern and severe threatenings. He endeavours to ascend to more fruitful regions, and comes now to warnings, and now to precepts which he seeks to embody in the duties of his daily life. These affording no peace, he climbs yet further, finding exceedingly great and precious promises, but feeling that he cannot, and must not, call them his own. Rising higher, the love of God breaks upon his view; would that he could find it God's love to himself! Climbing still, he comes to the cross of a dying Saviour, from which Mercy pleads even for the murderers of the Son of God, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Forgiveness which can compass and embrace such, can surely include him, and thus he passes into the peace of faith; and henceforth, from his high standpoint, he looks out with the joy of an heir of God, and of a joint-heir with Christ, on the spiritual territory around him. Thus do many, inverting the way of mercy as it is experienced by others, come into the knowledge of forgiveness by starting from the fear wrought by threatenings. Climb to the summit of Bible truth into the rest of faith how he may, that man will have a firmer peace and a broader outlook, who, discarding the sentimental and unintelligent idea that God is unmixed love to everything, finds a rich depth of mercy in contemplating the wrath which, in himself, he so fully merited, and which, through Christ, he has so completely escaped.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE GUILE OF THE GIBEONITES, AND THE LEAGUE WHICH THEY SECURED.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. On this side Jordan**]—*Lit.*, beyond Jordan; meaning the western side. The historian contemplates the invasion as having been made from the country east of Jordan. **Hills . . . valleys . . . coasts**] By "the hills" is meant the whole of the hill-country which became afterwards the territory of Judah and Ephraim; "the valleys" indicate the plain, or lowland, from Gaza to the Cape of Carmel; "the coasts of the great sea over against Lebanon" include the country on the coasts of the Mediterranean from the bay of Acre to Tyre. **The Hittite, etc.**] "The Girgashite is left out of this list. The Jewish tradition, sustained by Procopius, is that they fled the country on Joshua's approach, and settled in north-western Africa. Josh. xxiv. 11, shews that if they did thus flee, they fought against Israel, with the other tribes of Canaan, before their flight" (*Crosby*). **2. With one accord**] *Lit.*, "with one mouth," *i.e.*, unanimously. **3. The inhabitants of Gibeon**] "Gibeon was a city situated, as its name indicates, upon a hill. It was about forty stadia from Jerusalem, according to *Josephus*, *Ant.* vii. 11. 7 (50 according to his *Bell. Jud.* ii. 19. 1), on the road towards Beth-horon and Lydda. In size it surpassed Ai, being one of the royal cities, though then without a king. Its constitution was republican, under the government of elders; the republic embracing, in addition to Gibeon, the towns of Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath-jearim" (*Keil*). **4. Went and made as if they had been ambassadors**] "They went and travelled as ambassadors," or "they started on their journey as ambassadors" (*Keil*). "They did not pretend to be ambassadors, for they were ambassadors; the pretence consisted in their saying that they came from a distant land" (*Capellus*). **Wine bottles**] *Heb.*, wine skins. **5. Clouted**] From Saxon *clut* (Swed. *klut*), "a fragment of cloth," "a patch," also "a cuff, or blow, with the hand." In both of these senses, the word is still often used in some of the provinces. Chaucer, Ascham, Spenser, Shakspeare, and other old writers, repeatedly use it with the sense given to it in the text. **Mouldy**] "Spotted," or "crumbled," *i.e.*, falling to pieces because dry from being old. **6. The camp at Gilgal**] Reasons have already been given for the conclusion that this was not the Gilgal in the plains of Jericho, but "Gilgal beside the plains of Moreh" (cf. Deut. xi. 30; Gen. xii. 6), between Bethel and Shechem. It is apparently the same place which is mentioned in 2 Kings ii. 1, 2, as having Bethel *below it*. It is highly improbable that Joshua would have taken the entire body of the people back from Mount Ebal to the Gilgal of the first encampment, and thus have abandoned for a time the altar and the pillars containing the law, which it had been deemed of such importance to turn aside from the war and erect. **8. We are thy servants**] This was not a declaration of fealty, but is rather to be used as an expression of courtesy (Gen. xxxii. 4; l. 18), very adroitly introduced to turn aside the pointed question, which, however, Joshua abruptly presses back upon them. **10. All that He did to the two kings of the Amorites, etc.**] They craftily omit all reference to the miracle at the crossing of the Jordan, and to the victories at Jericho and Ai, "because it would have been impossible for the rumour of those events to reach them, if they came, as they said, from so distant a land" (*Masius*). **14. They took of their victuals**] *Marg.*, "They received the men by reason of their victuals." There seems no reason to suppose that the Israelites ate of the bread in token of their disposition to enter into covenant. They judged by the evidence of the dried bread, instead of asking counsel of the Lord by the Urim and Thummim (Numb. xxvii. 21). **17. On the third day**] That is the same as "at the end of three days" in verse 16. "The armed men would move from Gilgal to Gibeon (about twelve miles) in the same day on which the news was heard" (*Crosby*). Keil, with more apparent accuracy, reckons Gibeon as eighteen or twenty miles from Gilgal, and supposes the phrase, "the third day," to mean on the third day after the discovery of the stratagem. He adds: the third day "is not to be interpreted as meaning that their journey occupied three days," a statement which Fay conveniently overlooks while criticising Keil's opinion. **23. Ye are cursed**] "*Heb.* = '*arar*,' and not '*charam*,' whence *cherem*" (*Crosby*). Thus, although the Gibeonites were not devoted in the fullest manner, they were devoted in the sense of being set apart exclusively for the menial service of the tabernacle. They were the slaves of the tabernacle, and afterwards of the temple. Like the metal of the devoted cities, which, for another reason could not be destroyed, and which was dedicated to the service of the tabernacle, so these Gibeonites were still held to be forfeited to God. No one might employ them for his own private service. In these Hivites was begun the literal fulfilment of Noah's curse upon Canaan (Gen. ix. 25). **27. In the place which He should choose**] Shewing that this book was written before the building of the temple; or, if the words refer to an assigned place for the tabernacle, as seems most probable, Fay's view, that they indicate the appointment of the Gibeonites "at once to the lowest service of the sanctuary," must be held to be correct.

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1, 2.

### THE CONFEDERACY OF THE KINGS.

When about four hundred years after this league was made and broken up, David wrote what we know as the second Psalm, it seems as if the history of this confederacy must have been more or less fully present to his mind. A devout lover of the word of God, he would be familiar with the incidents of the combination; and, as the scene of the battle recorded in chapter x. was only a few miles from Jerusalem, he would be well acquainted with the very ground on which this southern half of the confederacy was defeated and destroyed. Who can say that the poet who was probably led to write the song of the thunder-storm (Ps. xxix.) to the movements of its own grand music, was not similarly influenced, on the human side, as he penned the prophetical lyric of the triumphs of the greater JOSHUA? We can almost think of David as just returned from Ajalon, and the remarkable pass of Beth-horon; as having read over, with a thrill of patriotism and piety, these yet exciting chapters of Joshua; as having his soul still moved by those exultant words from the book Jasher; and then as sitting down to write of those more glorious victories of the Son of God. Any way, the opening of this Psalm of wonderful prophecy reads almost like a song, prompted in part by this memorable history:—"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: Jehovah shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and trouble them in His sore displeasure."

This combination of the kings of Canaan may be considered in the following aspects:—

I. **The influences by which it was provoked.** "When all the kings *heard thereof*, they gathered themselves together, to fight," *etc.* The tidings which led them to plan this league may not have been the tidings of any one event in particular. They had recently "heard" of a good many things, more than a little calculated to attract attention, and to incite to some common action. Let us think of some of these things which presently brought about this combination. 1. *There was the anxiety that came from the Israelites' victories.* These runaway slaves from Egypt, who had been wandering up and down the southern deserts for forty years, like so many demented people, had actually overthrown the Amorites, all the Amorites on the eastern side of Jordan. Sihon and his people had fallen. Og and his people had fallen also. The men who formerly had dispossessed the "giants," and taken their country, were now, in their turn, overthrown and slain by these slaves. Suddenly the news is spread over the whole land that these people have crossed the river. Not even "the swellings of Jordan" had sufficed to stop them. Then came the tidings that Jericho had fallen, and soon that Ai, too, had been entirely destroyed. No wonder that the country was stirred by reports like these, from Gaza even unto Tyre. (*a.*) So long as they walk with God, any people may be victorious. Walking in the way of holiness, even recently liberated bondsmen soon become triumphant soldiers of Christ. "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength, because of Thine enemies." (*b.*) The victories of the past make way for yet more glorious triumphs in the future. They nerve and stimulate the conqueror; they dishearten and paralyse his foes. 2. *There was the dismay that arose from the supernatural element.* The staying of the waters of the Jordan, and the falling of the walls of Jericho, could not be other than the work of the God of heaven. These things must have reminded the Canaanites strongly of the traditions of the working of that same Almighty hand in the flood, from which their father Ham had escaped, and in the terrible destruction of Sodom. From the language of Rahab (chap. ii. 10, 11), and of the Gibeonites (verse 9), it is evident that there

was still some knowledge of God, and faith in God, among these backsliding descendants of Noah. When the people saw and heard such evidences of the working of God as accompanied the entrance of the Israelites into their land, they might well feel overcome with dismay. 3. *There was the hope which sprang from Israel's defeat.* These enemies of Canaan had been beaten at Ai; why might not the defeat which had been inflicted on them there be repeated elsewhere on a larger scale? What had been might be again. When they heard of this thing, perhaps then they took fresh courage, and resolved on this combination. Every defeat of a Christian is an encouragement to the world. 4. *There was the provocation which arose from the religious service at Ebal.* The Israelites were daring to behave as though already they were masters of the land. They had held a general convocation at which their laws had been proclaimed, at which their obedience had been avowed, at which an altar had been erected, and at which their God had been thanked and worshipped. And "when the kings heard thereof, they gathered themselves together." **II. The spirit in which it was promoted.** 1. *The confederacy was formed in a spirit of rebellion against God.* Not that the kings of Canaan wished to appear as acting against Jehovah. They would much have preferred to leave God entirely out of the question. But this could not be. In spite of themselves, they were constrained to believe that the Lord fought for Israel. It is worth while to notice that out of five instances in the book of Joshua, in which Canaanites are represented as speaking, three contain an expression of this conviction, and the remaining two are each merely the record of a command, and are so brief as not to exceed the limits of a single verse (cf. chapters ii. 9—12; ix. 9; ix. 24; ii. 3; x. 24). In every instance in the book in which a Canaanite speaks at any length, he confesses his belief in the God of heaven. Other grounds are furnished by the history for concluding that many of the inhabitants of the land felt that they were fighting, not merely against Israel, but against God. There is a point where opposition to men becomes rebellion against God. Where God is evidently with men, shewing that He shields and helps them as His people, to fight against them is to fight against Him. 2. *This confederacy was formed in a feeling of hearty unanimity.* They gathered together to fight "with one accord;" or, as stated in the margin, "with one mouth." The voice of all, excepting the Gibeonites, was unanimously for the league. Thus while the Church is sometimes divided in its defence of the truth, the enemies of the Church are united and firm in their opposition. They willingly sacrifice private differences and feuds in their resistance of truth and righteousness. When Christ is to be tried, even Herod and Pilate are straightway made friends. **III. The instrumentality by which it was anticipated and weakened.** The unanimity of the inhabitants of the land was hearty as far as it went, but it was not complete. 1. *The combination of the Canaanites was broken by a serious defection among themselves.* The Gibeonites went over to the other side of Israel. Although not required or permitted to take any active part in the war, the Gibeonites, by their secession, placed four important cities in the hands of the enemies of their country. (*a.*) Christ overcomes the world by the world. In His army, those who fight for Him were once contending against Him. The world is ever going over to the Church. The foremost Christian leaders of to-day, and of every age, were once opposed to the Saviour. (*b.*) Christ attacks individual men from within themselves. The human conscience invariably goes over to the side of truth; then the affections, the intellect, and the man often follow. 2. *For the purposes of the war, the position of these cities of the Gibeonites was among the most important in all the land.* With them in his possession, Joshua was able to break up the confederacy of the kings, almost ere it was formed. As Professor Wilkins has remarked, "he was able to drive his army like a wedge into the very heart of the hostile country, and strike his blows right and left at the isolated divisions of the enemy." The geographical position of nations has not been lost sight of by Providence in the conflicts of the cross. When England went over to Christ, Christianity obtained

a stronghold in *the very centre* of the world's future commerce and enterprise 3. *The time of the Gibeonite secession was no less important than the fact itself.* Just as the kings of Canaan had all combined to resist the Israelites, this defection of the Gibeonites severed the new union into halves. The southern confederacy hastened to wreak its vengeance on the traitorous cities; Joshua hastened to succour them, and ere the northern kings could join in the conflict, the southern half of the kingdom had fallen for ever. Thus, as events proved, no time could have been more favourable for the league of the Gibeonites with Israel. Thus, too, has it been in the history of the Church. When the faith of men in the Romish hierarchy was shaken by the corruptions of priests like Tetzel, Luther went over to Christ. The history of Christianity in England offers similar parallels. The events even now occurring in connection with central Africa, suggest similar thoughts. The results of recent missionary and geographical expeditions, and of events in Egypt and the South-east of Europe, seem as if working together and concentrating for the spiritual redemption of a long-neglected and degraded people. **IV. The ease with which it was utterly destroyed.** As the after history shews, the very efforts which the Canaanites made to defend themselves only served to haste. their overthrow. Apparently the combined forces of the kings effected no more harm than was done at Jericho, and not so much as was wrought at Ai. The battle at Gibeon was a rout, and that which was subsequently fought at the waters of Merom was little better. 1. *The number and power of the enemies of the Cross need offer no discouragement to the soldiers of Christ.* 2. *He fights safely and victoriously, who fights with God.* 3. *Every conflict between truth and error does but hasten the time when Christ "shall have dominion from sea to sea."* "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet."

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verses 1, 2.**—THE WITNESS OF LAST HOURS.

To the Israelites, or to the Canaanites, the end of life was rapidly approaching. Things had gone too far for any retreat, or for any room to hope for much mercy. Henceforth, manifestly, as it had really been from the first, the war was unto death. One nation or the other was about to be swept from off the earth. These possibilities of the end bear witness in every man. The secret places of the heart are turned towards the light. A dying man finds concealment difficult. The crisis without makes a revelation within. The hidden things, for once, come outside. Consciousness informs demeanour, and demeanour informs every beholder.

In the light of these final struggles between the representatives of truth and of idolatry, mark:—

**I. The hurried excitement of the sinful.**

**II. The strong confidence of believers.**

**III. The majestic calmness of God.**

THE FOLLY OF THE WICKED.

**I. The foolish delays of the ungodly.** Why was not this confederacy formed earlier? The overthrow of Sihon and Og might have been a sufficient warning that Israel was not an enemy to be despised as insignificant. Why did not the combined forces of the kings of Canaan meet the Israelites at the Jordan, and dispute with them the passage of the river? The ungodly are ever behind in preparing for the dangers of their future.

**II. The mistaken action of the ungodly.** After the displays of God's power at the Jordan, and at Jericho, this league was manifestly going from bad to worse. The folly of the former delay, looking at it on the human side, was now equalled by the folly of the present movement. It is not seldom God's way to take the wicked in their own net, and to bind them fast by their own mistakes.

"The Canaanites might have seen themselves in Jericho and Ai, and have

well perceived it was not an arm of flesh that they must resist; yet they gather their forces, and say, 'Tush, we shall speed better.' It is madness in a man not to be warned, but to run upon the point of those judgments wherewith he sees others miscarry, and not to believe till he cannot recover. Our assent is purchased too late, when we have overstayed prevention, and trust to that experience which we cannot redeem."—[*Bp. Hall.*]

"As once the Canaanites against Israel, so still and ever the foes of God gather themselves together to fight against Him and His Church."—[*Lange.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 8—15.

### An Ancient Estimate of the Value of Life.

We see in these Gibeonites and their history:—

I. **An overwhelming conviction of being on the side of error, and thus, in these hours of danger, on the side of weakness.** The Gibeonites did not lack courage. This very mission to Joshua was boldly conceived, boldly executed, and boldly defended. There is a singular freedom from trepidation in the telling of what, perhaps, was necessarily a clumsy story. This is manifest in their reply to the closely pressed question of the Israelites, recorded in the eighth and ninth verses. Nothing but a bold presence could have passed so poor a coinage. Even through the fear in which these men go to treat for their lives, boldness is evident. Moreover, the Gibeonites had a reputation for valour among their own countrymen: "Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities; it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty" (chap. x. 2). But these Gibeonites had become convinced that might and bravery would not avail them. They had heard "what Joshua had done unto Jericho and Ai," and putting the story of these recent triumphs and the tidings of several other marvellous events together, they were convinced that the Israelites were fighting on the side of God and of truth. Men judge their gods from a very utilitarian point of view. Just then the gods of the Gibeonites were manifestly very useless; and these cool-headed people, seeing that the help of Jehovah was something immensely different from the help of Baal or Ashtoreth, determined on a change of place, as a natural outcome of their change of faith. Let who will judge the manner of their change, for that was full of error and meanness; as to the fact, they did what myriads of people have done in all ages; they proved their former religious notions to be useless in the day of trial, and they went over to the side of power. They believed in God because of the prowess of God's people (verses 9, 10, 24). It was a poor, low, selfish faith, no doubt; make a discount for their surroundings, and their previous habits of religious thought and feeling, and they began with God as a great many people begin now—in the day of their trouble they sought the Lord. This view seems to have been common to the four cities of the Gibeonite republic: in this low measure of faith, a nation was born in a day. 1. *To some men the mighty works of God bring conviction, while in others they provoke a yet more deliberate rebellion.* The same story of Divine triumphs had gone through the whole land; as it was in Rome when Paul preached Christ, so it was in Canaan when God proclaimed Himself by many and marvellous works; "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not." It is ever thus, and probably ever will be. The colliery explosion, the railway accident, the ravages of disease, bring some men to meditate and to believe; others, the same providences harden. "Take heed how ye hear." 2. *In times of great danger the conviction of error is also the conviction of weakness.* Only truth is always strong, and everywhere strong. When Peter asked, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" he preached not only to human hearts, but out of a human heart. It does us good to hear such an exultant

question from Peter. Peter did not set a problem; he proclaimed an experience. Peter had set himself to seek safety behind the sword: that failed. Peter had followed afar off: that did not answer. Peter had tried to shield himself by lying, and by ungratefully shirking the responsibility of a trying connection: that led, within the same hour, to bitter tears. Peter had tried the other way. He followed embodied Goodness to Galilee, and, lo! it spake of love even to the denier, and said, "Feed my sheep." Peter had followed that which was good at Pentecost, and three thousand were added to the Lord. Peter followed that which was good, and it led him to prison; an angel delivered him. Thus had it been all his life; error had made him weak always, truth and righteousness had been strength everywhere. It is refreshing to hear such a challenge, when it comes to us from such lips. All might has its time of failure, saving the might which goes with truth. The "wooden walls of old England" are as reeds and rushes before the armaments of to-day. A granite fortress is of no good to the man who is dying. A man's intellectual power cannot make him strong to overcome his own fatal accident or fever. A noble imagination can do little in a prison, saving to mark with a keener sensitiveness the narrowness of the limits which confine the man. The "almighty dollar," as our American friends say when they wish to indicate the power of riches, is no match for an outraged and offended conscience. In some emergency or other, all things are weak, saving truth; when life is in danger, nothing but truth can make a man feel secure from harm. Happy is he who long before that trial comes has learned to cry, "Thy truth shall be my shield and buckler." **II. An irrepressible desire to preserve life, before which everything else has to give way.** These men placed their safety above everything else. 1. *Every man thinks life precious.* "Life," said a recent writer, "is lovely every way. Even if we look upon it as an isolated thing existing apart from the rest of nature, and using the inorganic world merely as a dead pedestal on which to sustain itself, it is still beautiful." The tallest and sublimest mountain would be simply a gigantic upheaval of desolation, but for the life which clothes its sides. The barren face of the cliff gathers not a little of its beauty from the background of life on which it is set. The long reach of the sea shore could be no holiday resort, but for beautifying life which is behind it. If life around us is esteemed so precious, perhaps it is not wonderful that we value even more highly the life that is within us. 2. *Some men will do anything, or almost anything, to preserve their lives.* Satan said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life." As pertaining to Job, the estimate was wrong. Here was a man who could say, as many others have done, "Though He may slay me, yet will I trust in Him." As pertaining to Satan's own children, the estimate was right. It seems to have been nearly correct as applying to these Gibeonites. (*a.*) *Think of their shameful disguise.* Probably they were the wisest and ablest men of this royal city, and yet they could demean themselves to dress up like this in order to be suffered to live. (*b.*) *Think of their low cunning.* The attire of their minds was more "clouted" than their sandals, and their manhood more "mouldy" and "spotted" than their bread. (*c.*) *Think of their lies.* The story which they told had no beginning in truth, and no end of falsehoods. It was a garb of falsities, woven throughout, with hardly a seam of truth to hold it honestly together. (*d.*) *Think of their wretched use of the name of God, and of their new-found faith in God.* On the one side, they pleaded their belief in Him; on the other, there was no depth of meanness and hypocrisy to which they did not prove themselves willing to descend. Thus these men, in endeavouring to save their lives, sacrificed everything for which true men would have deemed it worth while to live at all. 3. *Life may be purchased too dearly.* Dishonour of this deliberate nature was far too much to pay for its preservation. He who has lived long enough to forget that life has any dignity, has lived too long. Milton said rightly:

> "Nor love thy life, nor hate; but while thou liv'st
> Live well; how long, how short, permit to Heaven."

Every man who professes to believe in God, should be ready to say, with one of the later inhabitants of Canaan, "Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee." **III. The unmistakable earnestness of some men triumphing over other men.** These Gibeonites succeeded in their purpose by their real and genuine earnestness. We cannot commend their conduct in its details. Their manner of endeavouring to obtain this league was wrong. The earnestness, in itself, was good. The lord of the unjust steward commended him for doing a wise thing; he did not commend the manner in which the provision was made. The steward was commended for his wisdom in providing for the future, but not for his dishonest method. It is thus that these Gibeonites are to be commended: their aim to preserve life was right, their manner was wrong. Addressing the people of Wotton, Rowland Hill exclaimed, "Because I am in earnest, men call me an enthusiast. When I first came into this part of the country, I was walking on yonder hill, and saw a gravel-pit fall in, and bury three human beings alive. I lifted up my voice for help so loud, that I was heard in the town below, at a distance of near a mile. Help came and rescued two of the sufferers. No one called me an enthusiast *then;* and when I see eternal destruction ready to fall on my fellow men, and about to entomb them irrecoverably in eternal woe, and call aloud on them to escape, shall I be called an enthusiast *now?*" No man should be disconcerted by the charge of enthusiasm. 1. *If we are seeking to save our own lives, we shall do nothing without earnestness.* The Bible has no word of blame for the enthusiast. It reserves its reproaches for the indifferent. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." 2. *If we are seeking to save others' lives, earnestness is equally necessary.* Simeon, of Cambridge, is said to have kept the portrait of Henry Martyn in his study. Move where he would through the apartments, it seemed to keep its eyes upon him, and ever to say to him, "Be earnest, be earnest! don't trifle, don't trifle!" It is said that Simeon would gently bow to the speaking picture, and with a smile reply, "Yes, I will be earnest; I will, I will be in earnest; I will not trifle, for souls are perishing, and Jesus is to be glorified." If we would not go home alone, we too must be in earnest. The life of the soul is seldom saved, perhaps never, without deep spiritual earnestness. **IV. A very low measure of faith tacitly accepted by God.** Bp. Hall says: "If the secret counsel of the Almighty had not designed these men to be spared, Joshua could not have been deceived by their entreaty." No doubt that is true. But for the fact that God had resolved to spare them, we may rest assured that something would have betrayed them. Their secret would have come to the light ere the league had been concluded. But for this conclusion we are not left to conjecture. About four hundred years afterwards Saul slew some of the Gibeonites. What came of that breach of this covenant? God sent a famine on Israel for three years; and when David enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered, "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." It is not till seven of Saul's sons have been hanged, and the covenant made here at Gilgal has been thus honoured by Israel, that we read, "And after that God was intreated for the land." Thus did God set His own seal to the league which the Israelites made with these Gibeonites. Perhaps there is nothing in the whole word of God more encouraging to the anxious than this incident. The case of the Ninevites is encouraging. The threat of destruction had gone out against them; yet they said, "Who can tell if the Lord will turn from His fierce anger?" In that hope they were saved. Here, the threatening was in specially emphatic terms. The Israelites were solemnly charged to make no covenant with the Canaanites. The slaughter had already begun. Then God saw these poor men believing in His power, believing in the protection He was able to afford. In that faith God saw these men come begging for their lives. He saw the meanness and deception and lying with which these men clothed themselves within and without. But God also saw their faith, and because of that faith, poor and low as it was, His mercy forbore to expose them.

He suffered the eyes of Joshua and the princes to be blinded: nay, the story is so clumsy and stupid, that we are almost inclined to feel of these Israelites, that "their eyes were holden that they should not know" this deception as such. This is more encouraging than the case of the penitent thief, for against him there was the divinely appointed vow. God knew the training of these Gibeonites, and He had pity; God heard their lying, and abhorred the deception; God saw their faith, and if He made not haste to deliver, He made no movement to expose them to destruction. Through this incident God says in the Old Testament what Christ says to Jairus in the New: "Only believe." The poor selfish faith of these idolaters is suffered to become life to those who, already, were as good as dead.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 3—6.—DECEPTION AND ITS ADJUNCTS.

I. **Deception is by putting on appearances which are unreal and false.** The garb, and utterances, and conduct of these Gibeonites, furnish a lively and somewhat prolonged illustration of this obvious assertion. The imposition described in this chapter vividly depicts several of the more prominent features which are so often common to cases of deliberate deception. 1. *Assistance is often sought from dress.* The man who wishes to appear what he is not clothes himself in false garments. Dress has been distinctive almost ever since it has been worn. Different nations dress each in its own way. Offices, dignities, professions, the classes of society in which men move, are all indicated by distinctive dress. The phrase "plain clothes" indicates an entire genus of clothing which is official, or professional, to classify the various species of which would probably require an amount of patient perseverance hardly so much as suspected even by the most conscientious and laborious botanist; and then the "plain clothes," themselves, would have to be arranged into endless divisions which may be roughly indicated by the two great "families" of the sexes, and thence by such words as fabric, texture, colour, shape, quality, *etc.* Language is said to have needed a Babel to confuse it, and to cause it to diverge into the numerous tongues and dialects of the earth; dress has reached a similar diversity by the force of its own inherent power. The practice of dressing in false garments, to aid deception, is certainly not of modern origin, however common it may be now. Rebekah took the raiment of Esau in which to clothe Jacob, and then put upon the hands of the younger brother "the skins of the kids of the goats." When the wife of Jeroboam wished to deceive Ahijah, she disguised herself, and "feigned to be another." Zechariah was bidden to say concerning the prophets: "Neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive." This easy device of the Gibeonites is one which has probably been practised almost from the beginning. He who seeks to transgress will readily find aids to transgression. 2. *To render deception complete, other outward belongings have to be brought into harmony with the dress.* The bread and the wineskins were chosen to match the character selected. The expression of the face would have to be one of languor and weariness, and weariness in the tones would be necessary to harmonise with weariness in appearance. To all this, and more, there was added direct and continuous lying. When a man deliberately begins to sin, he should understand that he is only beginning; the new character which has been chosen must be made complete and unique. The more perfect the unity, the less is the danger of exposure. Thus, very literally, he who offends in one point is likely to be guilty in all. 3. *Deception sometimes requires, not only that outward things shall be unreal, but that inward graces shall also be assumed.* These Gibeonites had to deal with men before whom it was convenient to assume both humility and religious fear. We

cannot charge them with hypocrisy in their manifestation of godly fear; judging by the way in which they were afterwards protested by God, they should, perhaps, be credited with religious sincerity. Of one thing we may be confident: when men go as far in deceiving others as did these Gibeonites, it will need little more than the necessity to tempt them to feign religious feelings also. 4. *Whatever may be the form of its manifestation, the seat of deception is ever in the heart.* It is there that truth suffers distortion most severely. The outward guise of a deceiver, however fair it may be, is always ugly morally, because it is false; but the deformity of the heart is ever greater than the deformity of the act. Hearts are deceitful when the deceit never takes shape in actions, and that which we see always represents but a small part of that which is. How divine must be the patience which not only bears with what we see, but with the grosser impurities of the corrupt heart, only a few of which impurities are ever witnessed by men. Young might well regard the hiding of corruption at its source as the outcome of Divine compassion. He tells us truly:

"Heaven's Sovereign saves all beings but Himself
That hideous sight, a naked human heart."

Let us not forget that our inmost life is exposed to the gaze of the Lord. As among their fellows, men may say to each other, Let us

"Sleek o'er our rugged looks,
* * * *
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
Disguising what they are;"

but no outward assumption of innocence will hide us for a moment from Him who searches us, and knows our hearts; who tries us, and knows our thoughts. **II. Deception has not only various guises, but many purposes.** It lays all external things on earth under tribute for its garments: its purposes are not limited to earth, but enter heaven also. Imitating these "fathers of all modern diplomacy," men practise deception for political objects. Sometimes they seek to deceive in order to preserve life, or to serve ambition, or even to secure so comparatively small a possession as monetary gain. But deception is also attempted even before God. Prayer goeth out of "feigned lips." Love is not always "without dissimulation," even when it approaches Christ; it may but draw near, like Judas, to inflict the kiss of betrayal. Even at the door of heaven, deceivers dare to stand and say: "When saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee?" **III. Deception is not merely sin in the present; it is usually a pledge to sin also in the future.** No one who deceives others for a guilty purpose wishes to be discovered. The very character of such imposition supposes that it shall be repeated as often as may be necessary to prevent exposure. Thus this sin deliberately proposes as much future sin as may be necessary to hide the wickedness of the past. It is not merely an advance into the territory of transgression; it is a "burning of the bridges," to prevent any retreat into purity and integrity. The deceiver not only forfeits his truthfulness for the time being, but mortgages it for the time to come. **IV. The guilt of deception is not to be judged by the measure of its success, but rather by its purpose and method.** The object of deception may be not only innocent, but praiseworthy, in which case, providing that the manner of misleading be harmless, only the purist who judges God's law by its letter would hold it to be sinful. No one thinks of calling Joseph wicked, "because he spake roughly" unto his brethren, and took other measures to deceive them, till the time was come to make himself known. The command to place the cup in the sack of Benjamin might, to some, seem hardly justifiable; but the rough bearing and stern treatment under which Joseph chose to conceal his kinship, till he could win his brethren back to true brotherhood, can scarcely be reckoned blameworthy. Even our Lord, on one occasion, prudently concealed His intention of being present at the Feast of Tabernacles. The language in John vii. 8, may or may not be

ambiguous, in either view it was truthful; but coupling the reservation made in the language with the going up "in secret" which followed, there can be little doubt, to a fair-minded reader, that our Lord designed, for a time, to conceal His purpose. And why not? The way of truth binds no one to reveal all his intentions to every questioner. It is doubtless inexpedient that even innocent concealment should be practised often, because its frequent repetition would beget suspicion, and create an unhealthy influence; but for deception to be actually sinful, the deceiver must employ wrong methods, or contemplate some guilty purpose. In either of these cases the deceit attempted is a sin, irrespective of success or failure. **V. Deception is often but for a short time, and, in any case, must end with eternity.** This piece of craft on the part of these Hivites was fully exposed but a few days later. If not earlier, all deception will be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ. What is more, the heart's sense of its own guilt, in every sinful act of the kind, will have to be acknowledged. Then, even as was felt at the time of transgression, the person who sent down word that he was "not at home," will confess that he lied; and every equivocation, not needing to await the verdict of the Judge, will be pronounced innocent or guilty by each man's own conscience. A pure life needs little restraint from law, and will not concern itself much with mere questions of casuistry; an impure heart will always be on the safer side when it interprets the letter of Divine truth so as to limit its liberty in the direction of worldliness. He who abstains from "all appearance of evil," will be in little danger of having to condemn himself in eternity for the thing which he allowed himself in time.

Verses 7—9.—THE MISERY AND MEANNESS WHICH WAIT ON IMPOSITION.

**I. Impostors are in constant danger of detection.** The Inquisition in Spain is said to have contained many refined instruments of torture. Imposition is continually provoking enquiry; and, to the guilty, the inquisition of Truth must be as severe an ordeal as the Inquisition of the Romish Church.

**II. Impostors are repeatedly tempted to fresh iniquity.** "Peradventure ye dwell among us." . . . "Who are ye?" etc. Thus the way of sin is ever down hill.

**III. Impostors are continually subject to fresh humiliations.** "We are thy servants." "Because of the name of the Lord thy God" are we come. Beneath the lowest depth of degradation to which he has descended, the liar is ever finding "a lower still."

**IV. Impostors render even their sincerest words liable to suspicion.** This concern about God was probably real; the string of falsities by which the expression of it was surrounded, make it appear the most monstrous imposition of all.

Verse 8.—THE ABUSE OF THE COURTESIES OF LIFE.

The words, "We are thy servants," seem used here to turn aside the question in the previous verse. Consider:

**I. Courtesy as the expression of truth.**

**II. Courtesy as used to hide the truth.**

**III. Courtesy as a means to secure an end.**

"The Trick of the Gibeonites:—

"I. Shrewdly thought out. II. Cunningly carried out. III. Detected and punished.

"There is no thread so finely spun, but comes at last before the sun.

"Lying and deceit bring no blessing. Humble words alone do not accomplish it; they must also be true."—[*Lange.*]

"This history warns the congregation of God at all times of the craft and disguises of the world, which often, when it would be an advantage to it, seeks recognition and admission into the kingdom of God."—[*Gerlach.*]

"Nothing is found fitter to deceive God's people than a counterfeit copy of age. Here are old sacks, old bottles, old shoes, old garments, old bread. It is no new policy, that Satan would

beguile us with a vain colour of antiquity, clothing falsehood in rags. . . . If we be caught with this Gibeonite stratagem, it is a sign we have not consulted God.

"There is no wisdom in staying till a judgment come home to us: the only way to avoid it is to meet it half-way." —[*Bp. Hall.*]

Verses 9—11. THE FAME OF GOD.

The Gospels make repeated mention of "the fame of Jesus," which "went abroad into all the land," in the days of the Saviour's ministry. Only in two instances does this word appear to be applied to God in the Old Testament. On one occasion the expression comes from the leader of God's people. Moses makes the fame of God, in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, a plea for Divine mercy to them in the wilderness (Numb. xiv. 15, 16). On the other occasion, it is these idolatrous Hivites who say, We have heard the fame of Him, and all that He did in Egypt. Consider:—

**I. The fame of God in its cause.** 1. *The works of the Lord had been many and marvellous.* 2. *Divine power had been steadily and consistently directed against idolatry and sin.* God's hand had been lifted against sin, (*a*) when committed by the Egyptians, (*b*) when seen in His own people, (*c*) when indulged in by the Canaanites. 3. *The mercy of the Lord had continuously spared and forgiven the penitent.* It mattered not whether the suppliants were His own people, or those who were guilty as Rahab; sincere penitence was sure to be followed by Divine mercy. 4. *The Lord had safely shielded from their enemies all who had walked in His fear.* No malice or might of men had ever been able to harm His people, so long as they were obedient. Thus, even in these ancient days, was the fame of the Lord spread abroad through all that region. **II. The fame of God in its influence.** 1. *It filled with fear all who were not manifestly under Divine protection.* Rahab or Achan, the Gibeonites or the Canaanites, it mattered not; to be without God's covenanted mercy, was to have a heart that "melted and became as water." 2. *The mere fame of God, while sufficient to work fear, did not, in itself, move men to holiness.* These Gibeonites come with prayer, but also with lying. The fountain, troubled by fear, and not yet purified by love, sent forth, at the same place, both sweet water and bitter. **III. The fame of God in its issues.** 1. *Some heard of it, and they were hardened, and presently perished.* 2. *Some heard of it, and sought and found life.* 3. *Those who were saved found deliverance, not only for themselves, but for their defenceless children.* 4. *It is to be hoped that many whose lives were thus spared were afterwards saved spiritually.* **IV. The fame of God in its relation to God's people.** 1. *They should do nothing by which the Divine fame is marred.* 2. *They should continually make that fame known.*

Verses 14, 15.—ASKING COUNSEL OF THE LORD.

Through omitting to consult God by Urim and Thummim, Joshua and the princes of the congregation too hastily covenanted to spare the lives of these Gibeonites. What the Divine answer would have been, we are not told, and conjectures are useless. Possibly the Gibeonites would still have been spared; for although God had forbidden His people to make any covenant with the inhabitants of the land, He had not forfeited His own prerogative of mercy. These Hivites might still have been saved, as Rahab and her family had been saved. But although Joshua's oath may not have altered the issue, Joshua and the princes did wrong to swear that oath. God designed that Jacob should be preferred before Esau, but although the elder was to serve the younger, the conduct of Rebekah and Jacob was nevertheless blameable. God does not need our transgression of His commandments, in order to maintain either the truth of His promise, or the mercy of His character.

These verses teach us three principal truths:—I. He who walks in his own light must not wonder if the light prove to be darkness. Pliny said, "No man is wise at all times." Hare

writes, "The intellect of the wise is like glass: it admits the light of heaven, and reflects it." Nature itself teaches us, on every hand, that we need light from the Author of Light. 1. *The apparent plainness of the way should not prevent us in enquiring of God.* The Israelites took it for granted that the case made out by these Gibeonites was clear. Scripture does not often give examples of men who acted in error through omitting to pray; it prefers, instead of this, to shew us how many have triumphed through prayer. Perhaps in the stronger light of the life to come we shall see that not only has our true wisdom been in answer to prayer, but our serious errors have all occurred for the want of prayer. 2. *The past success of our career should lead us continually to Him from whom all success comes.* The repeated triumphs of the Israelites had unconsciously given them a sense of importance. Had they been filled with the spirit of dependence, they would not have needed to be reminded of the desirability of appealing to God; as it was, probably it did not so much as occur to them that this was necessary. **II. He who asks counsel of God may look for direction from God.** The reproof which the history gives, teaches us that if Joshua had sought the Lord, he would certainly have been answered. 1. *The encouragements given to the Israelites to ask Divine counsel were many and plain.* (*a*) The method of seeking Divine guidance was fully and clearly pointed out (cf. Exod. xxviii. 30; Numb. xxvii. 18—21). The blessing of the Urim and Thummim had been specially pronounced by Moses on the tribe of Levi as its choicest heritage. The Septuagint renders these two words by expressions signifying "*manifestation*" and "*truth*." However obscure the subject of the Urim and Thummim may be to us, we must not forget that it was comparatively clear to the Israelites. (*b*) The history of prayer, as it pertained to Israel, was no less encouraging. In the captivity of Egypt, on the borders of the Red Sea, and during the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, the people had many times proved in their own experience the blessedness of waiting on the Lord. 2. *The encouragements given to men now to ask counsel of God are far more numerous than they were of old.* We have the light cast upon prayer by the example of Christ, by the promises of the New Testament, and by the experience of godly men in all ages. We have the light cast upon the character of God by the life of Christ. To us every generation of men, and every page of Scripture, join in saying, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." **III. He who is guided by God may expect to be preserved from the errors which are natural and common to men.** Had Joshua but enquired of the Lord, he would not have been betrayed into this mistake. The rebuke given in the narrative, because of the error which was committed, is given on the assumption that had Joshua consulted God, the error would not have been possible. Our darkness is a consequence of our opinion that we see; our true light results from that sense of ignorance which drives us to ask guidance from our Father in heaven.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 16—27.

### The Treaty and its Consequences.

Soon after Joshua and the princes had sworn to preserve the lives of the Gibeonites, they discovered the imposition of which they had been made the victims. The treaty was concluded without asking counsel of the Lord, and it took only three days ere it began to bring shame and work confusion. This paragraph shews us:—

I. The sacredness which should ever attach to promises. Verse 18. The oath which had been solemnly sworn before the Lord might or might not have

been binding. The league was obtained by entirely fraudulent representations. It might be urged that when the conditions under which it was granted were proved to be feigned and false throughout, the league itself would have no more foundation in fact than the conditions had. Whether the conditions were expressly named in the terms of the covenant or not, this could make no difference whatever to the moral obligation of the Israelites in respect to keeping the covenant. By implication, if not expressly, the treaty was made with the Gibeonites on the ground that their story was true; and none knew this better than the Gibeonites themselves. If we proceed on the assumption that Joshua was not morally obliged to keep this treaty, the history makes the sacredness of promises in general still more emphatic. He kept his word when he was not bound to keep it, because the word of one man to another is a holy thing. Whether the treaty be considered binding or not, God solemnly approved the course eventually taken. 1. *A promise, once really made, should be held to be as sacred as an oath.* When Christ said, "Swear not at all," He did not mean to prevent men from giving the utmost possible assurance of fidelity to their fellows. The "yea, yea," and the "nay, nay," were to be felt to be as obligatory as the most solemn oath. 2. *Promises should be kept, even when they have to be kept at considerable sacrifice.* When David asked, "Lord, who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle?" he also answered, "He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." He who breaks his promise in order to spare his own capital robs the estate of human trustfulness, and thus pays a personal debt with public property. Such a man steals from the faith and rest and peace of mankind generally, that he may protect himself and the comparatively small circle associated with him. 3. *If possible, promises should be kept even when they have been fraudulently obtained.* Herein lies the chief emphasis of this story. Seeing that the treaty had been made, it was best that it should be kept. When once the Gibeonites had been punished for their lie, it was absolutely imperative that the treaty should be respected. Hence the chastisement which God inflicted, four centuries later, for Saul's breach of his promise (2 Sam. xxi. 1—14). God would have us keep our word at all times, unless the thing promised be in itself sinful. 4. *If we hope that God will keep His promises to us, we must keep ours to each other.* The Divine promises are only sure to us in Christ, and to break our promises to our fellows is, in this matter, to ignore Christ. The Saviour uses the same argument on the question of forgiveness: "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." **II. The opposition which is continually found in the way of truth.** "All the congregation murmured against the princes." It is not necessary to suspect the congregation of selfish motives, touching the question of spoil, because of this opposition. Probably the people feared the wrath of the Lord, because a league had been made which He had forbidden. The Israelites had recently suffered shame and anxiety and loss because of Achan's sin, and it is reasonable to suppose that they were mainly actuated to this murmuring against their leaders by their fear of the anger of Jehovah. 1. *He who contends for truth and uprightness must not expect to escape opposition.* 2. *Opposition to those who are faithful to truth is offered from various motives.* 3. *Such opposition should be firmly met* (ver. 19). He who contends for integrity may well stand firmly. He who strives for fidelity need not fear to be faithful. **III. The penalties which ultimately attend fraud.** The Gibeonites and their children were made slaves of the tabernacle for ever. Possibly if they had come openly, and pleaded for mercy, they would have been spared, as Rahab and her family had been. Israel had no right to conclude a covenant of peace with an entire city or people; for their general guidance they were forbidden to do so; it was not safe to trust them with powers to make peace with even single cities, lest repentance had been simulated by the Canaanites, and this deception had spread to city after city, and tribe after tribe, till Israel had entered into covenant with many of the inhabitants of the land who remained in heart as idolatrous as ever (cf. Deut. xx.

16—18) But had the leaders of Israel asked counsel of the Lord, He might have given them the right to make peace in this or any other particular instance. This is implied in chap. xi. 19. Judging by what we know of the character of God, He would certainly have commanded the Gibeonites to be spared, had they been penitent. There can be no doubt whatever about this. When God could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself: "As I live, saith the LORD GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live." The whole spirit of the Scriptures assures us that had all the Canaanites sincerely repented of idolatry, and sought Divine mercy, God would have pardoned them as readily as He afterwards spared Nineveh. This being so: 1. *The bondage of the Gibeonites must be regarded as a punishment.* Lying thought it could do better than candour and penitence; it set out to find life, and life was granted, but it was a life of perpetual slavery; confession would have found not only life, but liberty also. The bondage was the outcome of sin, and was meant also to be remedial. 2. *This bondage of the Gibeonites was expedient, because of the Israelites.* The social status of the Gibeonites was lowered, till the poorest Israelite would think little of the men, and less of their gods. Men do not learn of their slaves. The gods of Canaan, moreover, would be ignored daily by the very service which the spared Gibeonites rendered in the worship of the God of Israel. Thus God shews us that when we cannot remove a temptation, we are to disarm it. He shews us not less, how He makes all things work together for good to them that love Him. The habits of a lifetime could hardly be changed throughout an entire community by the penitence of a week. God suffers the prowess of His people to work prayer in the idolaters; He also suffers the prayer to go hand in hand with the deception. Then the slavery follows naturally as a punishment for sin—the sin of lying, and the half-repented sin of idolatry; and thus is the danger of a great temptation taken from the Israelites, and a purifying discipline, to continue through many generations, reserved for the idolaters themselves. Surely one of the most gladdening studies of heaven will be that in which the redeemed of the Lord search out the wonderful interworkings of the providence and grace by which, personally, each has been brought to his city of habitation, the New Jerusalem.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 16, 17.—FROM GUILT TO JUDGMENT.

Consider:—

**I. Guilt in its relation to exposure.** Sooner or later it must be revealed. The Gibeonites well knew, in their case, that it could not long remain hidden. Their feeling is very much the normal condition of guilty hearts generally. Guilt is like the moth of the summer evening; it will make for the light. The guilty heart feels that the tendency of things is ever in the direction of exposure, but hopes for concealment notwithstanding.

**II. Guilt in its connection with fear.** The state of mind in which the Gibeonites found themselves after the success of their ruse must have been most unenviable. The blow would come: when would it come? how would it come? Fear ever waits on sin. The guilty no sooner become guilty than they are delivered over to the keeping of fear. Even when God had brought the sin of Cain to the light, and sent him from the Divine presence, Cain was overwhelmed with a vision in which discovery was perpetually repeating itself, and death continually waiting on discovery: he cried, "It shall come to pass that every one that findeth me shall slay me." The murderer's vision of life was made up of two things: a state of chronic exposure, and a time of incessant judgment. Joseph's brethren succeeded for a long while in concealing their wickedness, but not even the years which intervened between their sin and their trial could keep down the consciousness that their old act of iniquity was approach-

ing the light. More than twenty years after their sin, they saw in the rough usage of the Egyptian lord the coming judgment of their crime: "And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother." A guilty heart continually goes in fear of coming exposure. It often feels about its wickedness, as one says of guilt, in a fragment by Landor:—

"It wakes me many mornings, many nights,
And fields of poppies could not quiet it."

Owen has told us that "One lie must be thatched with another, or it will soon rain through;" and the thatching is miserable work indeed when the thatcher is driven to feel that, labour ingeniously and perseveringly as he may, the rain will come through after all.

**III. Guilt finding its worst fears realised.** The Gibeonites could not hope to conceal their fraud for long; they could not but be anxious as to whether their trick would be resented. Their anxiety was not without cause. In less than a week the armed hosts of the Israelites, indignant at the treatment they had received, were seen marching hastily into the territory of the Gibeonites to demand an explanation, and, it might be, to take vengeance on the deceivers. The fear of the wicked is not vain. It has its counterpart in reality. It is the shadow cast on the heart by an actual cloud. It often precedes solemn judgment. About food and raiment, Christ says to His disciples, "Take no thought for the morrow. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." No such word is ever spoken to the unrepentant man concerning the judgment that follows sin.

Verses 18—20.—THE OPPOSITION OF THE PEOPLE TO THEIR LEADERS.

**I. The murmuring of the congregation.** Probably the people were concerned lest God should be angry. Possibly some murmured in view of lost spoil.

**II. The faithfulness of the princes.** They were faithful to their promise: 1. *Because of the solemnity of an oath* (cf. Ezek. xvii. 18—19). 2. *Because of the sacred name by which the oath had been sworn* (ver. 19). 3. *Although they had previously erred in not asking counsel of God.*

"The obligation of an oath should be so far held sacred by us, as to prevent our departing on pretence of an error, even from engagements into which we may have been led by mistake; the sacred name of God being of more importance than all the wealth in the world. Therefore, although a man may have taken an oath without sufficient consideration, no loss or injury can release him from his engagement. . . . . My decision therefore would be, that whenever it is only our advantage that is in question, we are bound to perform whatever we have promised on oath." —[*Calvin.*]

Verses 22—25.—THE BEARING OF TRUE MEN AND FALSE.

**I. The dignity that belongs to truthfulness.** Truth is greater in its defeats than lying is in its triumphs. 1. *It has a nobler demeanour.* 2. *It can discuss calmly even the details of the plan by which it has been overthrown.* 3. *To it, eventually, belongs the right of passing sentence.*

**II. The servility which accompanies falsehood.** Falsehood foreshadows its bondage in the spirit which it manifests. 1. *It can argue only from motives of self-interest.* 2. *It pleads its very fears as excuses.* 3. *It accepts its sentence without remonstrance.* 4. *It endeavours to the last to take advantage of that sense of right in others which has been wanting in itself.* "As it seemeth good and right to thee to do unto us, do."

Verses 26, 27.—The Nethinim.

These hewers of wood and drawers of water were probably appointed not merely to the work indicated in these words, but to the general drudgery of the tabernacle, and subsequently of the temple. In Ezra viii. 20 they are called "the Nethinim," that is, the "given" or "dedicated" ones. Henceforth these Gibeonites, then, were not their own; they belonged unto God in a perpetual servitude. Their history,

and the name by which they were afterwards known in Israel, suggest to us the following thoughts:—

**I. Life forfeited by sin, but preserved by grace.** The Gibeonites appear to have owed their lives to the princes; really, they owed them to God, who had so diligently taught His servants the sacredness of every promise. 1. *The lives of these men had been forfeited by their own iniquity.* They had become "devoted" by reason of the idolatry for which the rest of the Canaanites were actually slain. They might see their own deserts in the fate of their fellows. 2. *Their lives were preserved by Divine grace.* (*a*) By the grace of God in the leaders of the Israelites. (*b*) By the grace in which God afterwards shielded them from their enemies (2 Sam. xxi.). **II. Life preserved by grace, but preserved for work.** The Gibeonites were not to be useless. They were not to be mere pensioners in the land. They were to be the servants of the temple of the Lord. God's dedicated ones are not redeemed to idleness. They are called to arduous work, to constant work, to the humblest work. Christ washed His disciples' feet, to shew us in what lowliness we ought to serve one another. The Psalmist sang, "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." He who owes life to undeserved mercy may well serve in continual gratitude. Secker said, "God has three sorts of servants in the world: some are slaves, and serve Him from fear; others are hirelings, and serve Him for the sake of wages; and the last are sons, and serve Him under the influence of love." **III. Life preserved for work, and this work entirely for God.** The Nethinim might not be pressed into the service of the Israelites. They were not only the servants of God, but of God only. They were dedicated, or devoted, perpetually unto Him. Those whom grace saves (1) are not their own; (2) they belong not unto men; (3) they are the servants of Christ. They sing in the gladness of one who felt it no mean thing to belong unto Jehovah: "O Lord, truly I am Thy servant." One of our modern hymns, by far too little known, breathes, through six verses, the same spirit. The last four are these:—

"No longer would my soul be known
As self-sustained and free;
O not mine own, O not mine own!
Lord, I belong to Thee.

"In each aspiring burst of prayer,
Sweet leave my soul would ask
Thine every burden, Lord, to bear,
To do Thine every task.

"For ever, Lord, Thy servant choose,
Nought of Thy claim abate;
The glorious name I would not lose,
Nor change the sweet estate.

"In life, in death, on earth, in heaven,
No other name for me;
The same sweet style and title given
Through all eternity."

Thus should every pardoned and saved man and woman, not simply submit to, but delight in, the rank and dignity and labour of a servant of Jesus Christ. **IV. Life entirely devoted to God, and thus in the highest manner given to men.** 1. *No man serves his fellows, who does not serve God.* That which he does for them with one hand, he more than undoes with the other. He teaches men to live "without God in the world," and nothing can compensate for that. 2. *He serves his fellows most diligently, who also serves God.* It is "the zeal of His house" that leads men to consume themselves as willing sacrifices for others. Some of the most earnest of the apostles loved to begin their Epistles by calling themselves "servants (δουλοι) of Jesus Christ." As they felt how entirely they belonged to the Saviour, they saw in the utmost which they could do for men only "a reasonable service." 3. *He who is devoted to God is anxious to serve men in the highest possible manner.* He strives to serve them, not merely in things connected with the body and with time, but in priceless things touching the soul and belonging to eternity.

NEBY-SAMWÎL, OR GIBEON.

"The chief fame of Gibeon in later times was not derived from the city itself, but from the 'great high place' hard by (1 Kings iii. 4; ix. 2; 2 Chron. i. 3, 13); whither, after the destruction of its seat at Nob or Olivet, the tabernacle was brought, and where it remained till it was thence removed to Jerusalem by

Solomon. It can hardly be doubted that to this great sanctuary the lofty height of Neby-Samwil, towering immediately over the town of El-Jib, exactly corresponds. The tabernacle would be appropriately transferred to this eminence, when it could no longer remain at Nob on the opposite ridge of Olivet; and, if this peak were thus the 'great high place' of Solomon's worship, a significance is given to what otherwise would be a blank and nameless feature in a region where all the less conspicuous hills are distinguished by some historical name. This would then be a ground for the sanctity with which the Mussulman and Christian traditions have invested it, as the Ramah and the Shiloh of Samuel, even though those traditions themselves are without foundation. In Epiphanius' time it still bore the name of the Mountain of Gibeon; and from its conspicuous height the name of 'Gibeon' ('belonging to a hill') was naturally derived to the city itself, which lay always where its modern representative lies now, on the lower eminence. From thence the Gibeonites 'hewed the wood' of the adjacent valley, and 'drew the water' from the springs and tanks with which its immediate neighbourhood abounds, and carried them up to the Sacred Tent; and there attended the 'altar of the Lord,' which, from its proud elevation, overlooked the wide domain of Israel."—[*Stanley's Sinai and Palestine.*]

HEWERS OF WOOD AND DRAWERS OF WATER.

"I was forcibly reminded of one item in the sentence of condemnation pronounced upon the Gibeonites—that they should be hewers of wood—by long files of women and children carrying on their heads heavy bundles of wood. It seemed to be hard work, especially to the young girls. It is the severest kind of drudgery; and my compassion has often been enlisted in behalf of the poor women and children, who daily bring loads of wood to Jerusalem from these very mountains of the Gibeonites. To carry water, also, is very laborious and fatiguing. The fountains are far off, in deep wadies with steep banks; and a thousand times have I seen the feeble and the young staggering up long and weary ways with large jars of water on their heads. It is the work of slaves, and of the very poor, whose condition is still worse. Among the pathetic lamentations of Jeremiah there is nothing more affecting than this: 'They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood.'"—[*The Land and the Book.*]

## CHAPTER X.

### *THE OVERTHROW OF THE CITIES OF THE SOUTH.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. Adoni-zedek] = "lord of righteousness." Melchi-zedek was apparently king of the same place in the time of Abram. The Jebusite kings may have borne this title, as the rulers of Egypt and Rome did that of Pharaoh and Cæsar. The appellation "Jabin" was, perhaps, similarly given to the Canaanitish kings of Hazor (cf. chap. xi. 1, and Judges iv. 2). Jerusalem] = "possession of peace," or "seat of peace." This is the first time that the name occurs in the Scriptures. "There is no ground for questioning the identity of Salem (Gen. xiv. 18) and the city which was afterwards called *Jeru-shalem*. The supposition that the name Jerusalem dates from the time of David is altogether without support from history, and overthrown by the fact that the city of the Jebusites was called the *city of David* (2 Sam. v. 9) after David had taken it; whilst the name Jerusalem bears no relation whatever to the circumstances of David's time. It does not follow that because Jerusalem was also called *Jebus* before the time of David, so long as it was in possession of the Jebusites (Josh. xviii. 28; Judges xix. 10; 1 Chron. xi. 4), therefore it had no name besides Jebus. All that can be inferred is, that in addition to its proper name Jerusalem, contracted Salem, it was also called *Jebus*, from its inhabitants; just as Hebron was also called Kirjath-Arba, from the family of Arba (comp. chap. xiv. 15)." [*Keil.*] 2. As one of the royal cities] *Marg.* = "cities of the kingdom." Although the leading city of only a small republic which was governed by elders, Gibeon probably surpassed in dignity and power many of the cities in which a king dwelt. 3. Hebron] One of the most ancient and important cities of the land. Antiquity referred to in Numb. xiii. 22. Nearly twenty miles south of Jerusalem. Celebrated in connection with Abraham, David, and Absalom. The Cave of Machpelah was close by. The city was given to Caleb at the distribution of the land. Jarmuth] About fifteen miles south-west of Jerusalem. There was another city of the same name in the lot which went to the tribe of Issachar (chap. xxi. 29). Lachish] It was afterwards fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 9). Amaziah was slain here by conspirators from Jerusalem. The city became famous by the siege which it suffered during the reign of Hezekiah, allusions to which are made in the historical and prophetical books of Scripture. The siege of the city by Sennacherib is said to be further commemorated by a remarkable bas-relief found at Nineveh. Lachish is thought to be the modern *Um Lâkis*, but this is opposed by Robinson. Eglon] Probably identified in *Ajlan*, about thirty-four miles south-west of Jerusalem, in the low country of Judah. 4. Come up unto me, and help me] It does not seem clear, as several have supposed, that these words are a command, and that Adoni-zedek, as a superior monarch, had some general authority over the rest of the southern kings. It is more natural to suppose

that he feared Jerusalem might be the next place attacked by Joshua and the Gibeonites. It was the nearest important city to the now common foes of Canaan, and was thus most in danger. Hence the words are probably to be taken as an entreaty, not as a command: "Come up unto me, and help me." 7. **So Joshua ascended**] "He drew near; not, he went *up*, as *De Wette* has wrongly translated it." [*Keil.*] So the phrases "come up" and "went up," in verses 4, 5, are probably used in the "military sense" given by *Rosenmüller*—"come up with forces." **From Gilgal**] Probably Gilgal "beside the plains of Moreh" (cf. Deut. xi. 29), to which the camp seems to have been removed previous to the service at Ebal. "If the reading of the Hebrew text (2 Kings ii. 2, 4), 'they *went down*,' is right, then the Gilgal spoken of in ii. 1 cannot be that near Jericho; and another Gilgal must be sought in the mountains north-west of Bethel; where some such place is indicated by the ancient Canaanite kingdom of the 'nations of *Gilgal*' between Dor and Tirzah (Josh. xii. 23), and where a modern village exists, called Jiljûleh. But the LXX. read ἦλθον, 'they came.'" [*A. P. Stanley.*] 10. **Jehovah discomfited them**] Discomfited them by the Israelites. In the same manner it is said that Jehovah "slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon," before the storm of hail came. **Azekah**] Near to Shochoh (1 Sam. xvii. 1), and probably on the road to Gaza. It was fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 9), was fought against by the king of Babylon (Jer. xxxiv. 7), and was still standing when the Jews returned from the captivity (Neh. xi. 30). **Makkedah**] *Groser* supposes that it has been "identified by *Lieut. Conder* with El Mughâr (*the cave*), between seven and eight miles from Ramleh." 11. **Great stones . . . hailstones**] Intimations of their destructive effects are given in Exod. ix. 19, 25; Job xxxviii. 22, 23; Ezek. xiii. 11—14, etc. Records of several storms in the East are preserved, in which it is stated that the hailstones, or stones of ice, were found to weigh from half to three-quarters of a pound. (But cf. Rev. xvi. 21.) 21. **None moved his tongue**] A proverbial phrase, intimating that even the most offensive and insolent should be awed into absolute silence (cf. Exod. xi. 7; also Judith xi. 19). 24. **Put your feet upon the necks**] The customary token of the triumph of the conquerors and the humiliation of their enemies. Joshua commands it here as an earnest of the victories yet to be won (ver. 25). From this custom such passages as Ps. cx. 1, Isa. xxvi. 6, derive their meaning and force. 28. **And that day**] On the day of the great victory just recorded. The army seems to have returned from Azekah with the intention of encamping for the night at Makkedah (verses 10, 21; see also maps, placing Makkedah near to Ramleh). On reaching Makkedah, the people proceeded to slay and hang the five kings (verses 22—26). While the kings were yet suspended on the trees the Israelites attacked and destroyed the city and its inhabitants (ver. 28). Then, before encamping for the night, they cut down the bodies of the kings, as the law commanded, and buried them; the account of this being given in verse 27, and before the record of the destruction of Makkedah, to preserve the unity of the paragraph. Thus was the arduous work, of what might well have been a very long day, completed; the sun "going down" (ver. 27), at least now, at its appointed time. 29. **Libnah**] Another of the cities belonging to the Shephelah, or low country of Judah. It was besieged by Sennacherib (2 Kings xix. 8), and it was probably in this neighbourhood that the 185,000 Assyrians were slain, in one night, by the angel of the Lord. Dean Stanley and Van de Velde differ as to the site of Libnah—the former placing it at *Tell es-Safieh*, five miles N.W. of Eleutheropolis, and the latter, with more confidence, at *Arâk el-Meushiyeh*, four miles W. of Eleutheropolis. 32. **On the second day**] On the second day of the siege. Thus, even in the days of Joshua, Lachish gave indications of the strength, as a fortified town, which was manifested in its subsequent history. 33. **Gezer**] This city is not said to have been destroyed. Judging by 1 Kings ix. 16, some have concluded that it "was not subdued till Solomon's days." This is obviously a mistake, for with "none remaining" of the inhabitants, what could there have been left to subdue? The city, as was the case in other instances, was no doubt speedily re-occupied by the fugitive Canaanites, and thus re-inhabited it was spared, and made to "*serve under tribute*" (cf. chap. xvi. 10; xxi. 21; Judges i. 28, 29). Twice in the history of David's time it is called Gazer. "Perhaps the strongest claims for identity with Gezer are put forward by a village called *Yasûr*, four or five miles east of Joppa, on the road to *Ramleh* and *Lydd*" [*Smith's Bib. Dict.*] 38. **Debir**] The same as Kirjath-sepher, "the city of the Oracle," or the "Book." Sometimes called Kirjath-sannah, from its palm trees. It was near Hebron. There were two other places called Debir. 37, 39. **And all the cities thereof**] Shewing that both Hebron and Debir had smaller cities under their respective governments. 40. "**The hills**] *i.e.*, the mountain country; **the south**] *i.e.*, the Negeb, or land on the southern slopes toward the desert; **the vale**] *i.e.*, the Shephelah or Philistine plain; **the springs**] *i.e.*, the ravines on the borders between the mountain country and the Shephelah" [*Crosby*]. **He left none remaining**] Many, however, fled into Philistia and elsewhere, and returned as soon as they were able to do so. 41. **From Kadesh-barnea even unto Gaza**] The southernmost line of the land of Canaan, from about twenty miles below the Dead Sea to Gaza, on the Mediterranean coast. The site of Kadesh-barnea is unknown. **Goshen even unto Gibeon**] Goshen is also unknown. It was possibly so named by the Israelites in memory of their dwelling-place in Egypt, and apparently must have been somewhere south of Hebron. It is again named in chapters xi. 16; xv. 51. The two lines of description, one on the extreme south, and the other through the midst of this part of the land, are evidently meant to describe Joshua's complete conquest of all southern Canaan.

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—11.

### The Defeat of the Five Kings.

This chapter is full of movement and energy. It is a rapidly shifting drama, in which we see passing before us scenes of surprising vigour, ending in results of colossal magnitude. It is a kind of heroic song of the wonderful wars of the Lord, in which the poetry is made to depend on the energy of facts, rather than on the rhythm of language. The key-words of this historic canto are "speed," "force," "revolution." Nothing could well be sufficiently sudden to be out of time with its quick movement, nothing mighty enough to be out of character with its overwhelming energy, nothing huge enough to be disproportionate to its gigantic results. The simple and inartistic record of Joshua fairly leaves behind it, as a thing of comparative languor and weakness, the otherwise stately historic fiction of Homer. In response to the swift messengers of the generally brave but then trembling Jebusites, five armies are rapidly concentrated on Gibeon. Ere they arrive before the city, the Gibeonite elders promptly despatch a post by way of Bethel to Joshua at Gilgal, begging him in the most fervent words to come up and save them from their enemies. The selected portion of the troops immediately strike their tents, and marching all night from near Shiloh to Gibeon, a distance of from fifteen to eighteen miles, as the sun rises they burst like a living torrent on the assembled armies of the kings. Then comes the flight down the western pass, and the fearful accompaniment of slaughter by the pursuing Israelites. After a long ascent, Upper Beth-horon is reached, and the instrument is changed, but not the slaughter. The heavens, which had rained down fire on the fathers at Sodom and Gomorrah, now pour forth upon the children destroying hail. "The Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword." Meanwhile the day seems to have waned towards closing. The sun was already "in the bisection of the heavens" —possibly nearing the horizon. Then, taking the record as it stands before us, come Joshua's sudden appeal to Jehovah, and the marvellous prolongation of the day, till the people have fully "avenged themselves upon their enemies." Nor does the record of wonders cease, even with this. The chapter which opens with such an exhibition of activity and might, ends with a rapid procession of fresh battles and new victories. Besides Makkedah, which Joshua takes on that same day, ere "the going down of the sun," five important cities are utterly destroyed by the Israelites; Horam, king of Gezer, and his people, are also slain; and then the historian, no longer descending to details, sums up the account in a few words of general description, intended, no doubt, to indicate the fall of several minor cities and villages: "Joshua smote them from Kadesh-barnea even unto Gaza, and all the country of Goshen even unto Gibeon." So imposing, even in these brief and simple chronicles, are the mighty works of the Lord; and so easily victorious are the people whom He leads on from place to place in the train of His triumph!

This opening paragraph of the chapter sets before us four principal topics for consideration:—**I. The earnest request of the Jebusites.** Through their king they sent to these four cities of the south, saying, "Come up unto me, and help me, that we may smite Gibeon." In taking this course, they may have had several motives. 1. *They were partly moved by fear* (ver. 2). The fear of the wicked has several defects. (*a*) It generally comes too late. Fear of God, attended to in time, is the "beginning of wisdom." Such fear, when too long neglected, is the dark shadow of approaching ruin. (*b*) When it does come, it is resisted. The fear of the Lord never comes too late for pardon, when it brings men in penitence to His feet; but it does often come too late to lead them there. (*c*) This fear of the Lord is resisted because both it and He are misunderstood. To fear, in some instances, is no sign of wanting courage. To fear a shadow is

the fear of folly; to fear the rock-bound coast in a storm, and to seek because of that fear to give it as wide a berth as safety requires, is a seaman's wisdom. It is wise, in a sanitary point of view, to fear to live in a filthy street, to drink polluted water, or to suffer an accumulation of any of the conditions which certainly bring disease. In a social and moral point of view, he is wise who fears to sin. There are multitudes of things which no man and no number of men can resist. To resist the fear of God is to misinterpret a warning voice that speaks kindly; it is to fail to understand God. 2. *They were possibly actuated by a desire for revenge.* To smite the Gibeonites would, from their point of view, be to smite traitors. But those who go over to the side of God are, in reality, merely returning in true allegiance to their rightful sovereign. Those who put themselves under divine protection take no vain measures for safety. He can keep them, and loves to keep them. 3. *They may have been impelled to attack the Gibeonites by policy.* It would be dealing with their enemies in detail. Hence the suddenness of the movement. The policy is always bad, however promising it may appear, which opposes God. As Bishop Hall says: "If they had sat still, their destruction had not been so sudden. The malice of the wicked hastens the pace of their own judgment. No rod is so fit for a mischievous man as his own." 4. *Thus do fear, and revenge, and mere policy work together for destruction.* All things work together for good to them that love God; all things work in the opposite way to them who do not. **II. The urgent prayer of the Gibeonites** (ver. 6). 1. *The Gibeonites, also, were influenced by fear.* Freedom from fear does not come by merely getting on the side for which God fights, but by getting to know God, and by getting into His mind and will. The Gibeonites, as yet, were a long way from this. 2. *Their trust, in this emergency, was honourable rather than presumptuous.* They had deceived Joshua, but seeing that he had ratified the covenant with them, they did well to conclude that he would afford his protection. The forgiven sins of our past should not hinder our trust in the present. We honour God more by our trust than by our fears lest we should presume. Great fear of our own sufficiency may go with great faith in the Lord, and with confidence in the fidelity of those who are really under His teaching and guidance. **III. The prompt fidelity of the Israelites** (verses 7—9). Joshua, and all Israel with him, immediately responded to this appeal of the Gibeonites. 1. *The obligation felt by a true man to defend all belonging to him.* The Gibeonites were weak, compared with the host gathered against them. They were the mere servants of the Levites, and their position was the humblest in all Israel. The danger of the weak does but inspire a true man. The meanest part of the body calls, no less than the head itself, for the full strength of the defending arm. 2. *The responsibility felt by a true man to honour, not merely the letter, but the very spirit of his words.* Joshua had only promised to "let them live" (chap. ix. 15), and not to risk the lives of his army to save theirs. Thus ran the letter of the league. But to have no occasion against them, and to have recognised them as servants of the tabernacle, was for Joshua to feel bound to defend them. "He knew little difference betwixt killing them with his own sword and the sword of an Amorite: whosoever should give the blow, the murder would be his. Some men kill as much by looking on as others by smiting. We are guilty of all the evil we might have hindered." [*Bishop Hall.*] 3. *The energy with which a true man is inspired when he feels himself in the way of right.* "Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night." "He gives twice, who gives quickly," says the old Latin proverb. For Joshua not to have aided Gibeon at once, would have been to lose the opportunity altogether. We may well go promptly where righteousness bids us go at all. 4. *The comfort given by God to a true man who readily undertakes what is difficult because it is right* (verse 8). He who conscientiously and promptly follows the way of truth when it is dangerous, and when he might readily find excuses for being elsewhere, may always hear the "Fear not" of the Lord, if he will only listen. **IV. The gracious co-operation of Jehovah** (verses

10, 11). 1. *The comforting words of the Lord are not merely words.* The words of His encouragement are but the forerunner of Himself. They are the earnest of the future possession. The mighty hand of God is ever at the back of the gracious utterances of His lips. 2. *The works of the Lord ever exceed those of His people, and sometimes visibly.* It was He who discomfited the Canaanites before Israel. They were but the instrument through which He worked, even in the first part of the battle; and ere the battle closed, His hand, without theirs, slew more than all Israel together. 3. *The promise of the Lord knows no limit by reason of His people's insufficiency.* Weary with the night's march and the morning's conflicts, many of their enemies would have fled to the walled cities, and have made good their escape, but for Divine interposition. But God had said, "I have delivered them into thine hand;" and where the hand of Joshua would have failed to smite these idolaters, "the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died." Where our hands fail through weakness to overtake the complete measure of the promises, there may we look for help from the outstretched hand of God till all be fulfilled.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verse 1. Names.**

This verse contains a curious conjunction of significant names, which, while worthy of passing remark, should not be pressed into fanciful extremes. "What's in a name?" In some of the names that follow, we cannot but trace the Divine Hand and purpose, as we are so often compelled to do in the early nomenclature of Jewish history.

**I. A bad man with a good name.** *Adoni-zedec*, "Lord of Righteousness." A pious name is no guarantee of a holy heart.

**II. A good man with a good name.** *Joshua*, "the salvation of Jehovah," or, "he shall save." This is a name which we cannot but feel that Providence directed to be given to the leader of Israel. A good name may well be felt by its possessor to be an incentive to a good life. A little superstition in this direction might be rather useful to some men, and lead them to "accomplish a destiny" which at least might have the merit of doing less harm to other people than that which, for want of some ideal, they finally do accomplish.

**III. A great city with its greatness foreshadowed in its name.** *Jerusalem*, "possession of peace," or, "vision of peace." Thus the metropolis in the Kingdom of Peace anticipates, from the first, the glory and honour which should come to it. Even the names of its early kings seemed to herald Him under whose reign its glory should be consummated.

**Verse 2. The Influence of the Great.**

**I. The example of the wisest and bravest men in a community provoking fear.** When this free state, with its mighty men, gave up resistance as hopeless, who else might think to fight successfully?

**II. The numerous instruments which God has for accomplishing His purposes and fulfilling His word.** God had repeatedly said, "I will send my fear before thee" (cf. Exod. xv. 14—16; xxiii. 27; Deut. xi. 25). The Lord here fulfils this word (1) by means of some of the Canaanites themselves, and (2) by those of them esteemed to be most eminent.

**Verses 6, 7. The Deliverance of the Gibeonites.**

Joshua's rescue of the Gibeonites was:—

**I. The deliverance of a people who a little while before were under sentence of death.** The sentence against them had in no way differed from that against the rest of the Canaanites. But for their repentance, that sentence would have been as certainly carried out against them as against the rest.

**II. The deliverance of men who had sought protection in a mean and unworthy manner.** 1. *They had sought*

*pardon at the eleventh hour.* 2. *They had sought it by subterfuge and lying.* Yet God forgave their sin even in view of so imperfect a trust and so poor a repentance.

III. The deliverance of men who in the hour of their need appealed to the covenant. On their side, that covenant was all imperfection. Touching their part of it, in it there was no good thing whatever. Yet these Gibeonites did well to believe that God's people, and through them God Himself, would hold the other side of that covenant to be sacred. The Psalmist said, "I am Thine: save me;" so these Gibeonites dared to plead that they were servants of Israel, and though they became so unworthily, the league was recognised as binding.

"The greatest obligation, to a good mind, is another's trust, which to disappoint were mercilessly perfidious. If Joshua's very Israelites had been in danger, he could have done no more. How much less shall our true JOSHUA fail the confidence of our faith! O my Saviour, if we send the messengers of our prayers unto Thee into Thy Gilgal, Thy mercy binds Thee to relieve. Never any soul miscarried that trusted Thee. We may be wanting in our trust; our trust can never want success."—*Bp. Hall.*

Verse 8. THE LORD'S ENCOURAGEMENT OF HIS SERVANTS.

I. Divine encouragement given when unsolicited. It was needed, but apparently not asked. The right heart, from its very rectitude, is "praying always."

II. Divine encouragement given in the way of duty. God spoke to His servant when he was respecting an oath the keeping of which had been opposed by the people.

III. Divine encouragement given when in the act of succouring the weak. He who loves our compassion for others, will not withhold His compassion from us. We are but on the errand of His own heart. Prov. xxiv. 11, 12; Matt. xii. 20.

IV. Divine encouragement pointing to absolute and complete victory. "There shall not a man of them stand before thee." We too are told of the "last enemy" as one that shall be destroyed.

V. Divine encouragement the forerunner of omnipotent help (verses 10, 11). The Lord loves to establish His words unto His servants, upon which He has "caused them to hope."

Verses 6—11. 1. Gibeon's need. 2. Joshua's faithfulness. 3. God's help.

"If men come to us for help in time of need, God gives the courage to render aid. True courage comes alone from God.

"If a man has once gained a real victory over his spiritual foes, he must boldly follow it up without indolent delay, and faithfully reap the fruits of the success given him."—*Lange.*

## *THE MIRACULOUS PROLONGATION OF THE DAY.—Verses* 12—15.

Whatever may have been the view adopted by expositors in the exegesis of the text of this remarkable passage, and in the explanation of the phenomena to which it refers, only one thing of a positive character seems as yet to have been fully and satisfactorily proved; and that is, the inexpediency of urging any particular view in the spirit of an over-confident dogmatism. Theories have been advocated, which, perhaps, may very confidently, and yet fairly, be pronounced erroneous; but that is a different matter. It is one thing to know that a given explanation cannot possibly be right, and another thing to know with equal certainty what is the right explanation. With so much obscurity pertaining to the character of the text, and with so much difficulty attaching to any probable explanation of the miracle itself, it is a comparatively easy course to set out with a given theory, treat very lightly all which is urged against it, render as emphatic as possible everything which can be said for it, and then consider the case proved.

Such a method, however, is not ultimately helpful in the settlement of any involved question, and is certainly unworthy of the dignity of Biblical truth. Those who have read most closely, and thought most conscientiously, on this alleged miracle at Beth-horon, will probably be least inclined to dogmatise in any attempts which they may make to construct a positive theory of explanation.

It is not within the scope of a work like this to discuss the question of these verses at any considerable length. It is only proposed to examine one or two recent theories of exposition in which attempts have been made to do away, more or less fully, with the miraculous element; and then to endeavour to ascertain whether the older belief in an actual prolongation of the day by miraculous interposition, *in some way or other*, be not the most feasible view which can be taken of the matter.

The principal exposition on which modern opponents of the miracle have relied, may be described as

**The theory of interpolation.** Rejecting the unity of authorship in the book of Joshua, some commentators have held that it is a compilation from several other documents. This view, which is by no means a modern one in its leading idea, has been advocated and expanded by, among others, Tuch, Stähelin, Bleek, and notably by Ewald and Knobel. The Dutch theologian, C. H. van Herwerden, thought he found in the style of the book "*ten* different monumenta, from which it is compiled." Taking the theory at the stage at which it has more recently been left by Knobel, it may be briefly summarised as follows. The book of Joshua is asserted to have been compiled by a "Jehovist," from three sets of documents. The principal of these are termed "Elohistic" records, and are supposed to form the "ground-text" for the work. The supplementary documents are said to be two: first, the "Law Book," which was supposed to contain laws, historical reports, and poems; the remaining documents being named the "War Book," which is said to be alluded to in Numb. xxi. 14, and to have been composed of a great number of warlike narratives. Finally we are told that the "Jehovist," or the compiler of the book of Joshua, "cannot have lived before the Assyrian period, because he has the 'Law Book' and the 'War Book' before him. Since, moreover, the 'Law Book' especially comes down to Hezekiah, the last years of this king are about the earliest date to which the 'Jehovist' can be assigned."

All this being granted, by any who choose to grant it, the theory of Knobel as to these four verses then is, that they are "a fragment from the first document of the 'Jehovist;'" that is, that they were inserted by the compiler of the book of Joshua, as late as the last years of Hezekiah, from the documents termed the "Law Book." While differing from Knobel in details, this is substantially the view adopted by the leading advocates of the theory of interpolation.

Let us see to what this rationalising amounts, and whether it has sufficient of "sweet reasonableness" to make it rational. First, let it be remembered that each of the three sets of documents are imaginary. The "Elohistic ground text" is nothing else. The "Law Book," by a very free application of the phrase "*Sepher Hayyashar*," here rendered "the book of Jasher," or of "the upright," is also imaginatively identified with a hypothetical book containing laws, historical reports, and poems. Thus, in this second case, fancy has "a wheel within a wheel." The "War Book" also succeeds in getting a kind of Scripture name, though little more can be said in its behalf. This "book of the wars of Jehovah," we are told, "contained a great number of warlike narratives—more, in fact, than all the others together, . . . . and appears to have originated in the southern country, . . . . *as it agrees very nearly in matter and style with the ground-text.* . . . . The author, from his interest in religious legislation, was probably a Levite, . . . . and wrote in the time of Jehoshaphat." Then we find this book, so comfortably imagined and so fully described, just as easily identified with the records mentioned in Numbers xxi. 14. What is even more remarkable, certain

passages in the book of Joshua, after having been imagined off into the separateness of belonging to a "War Book," are just as jauntily distinguished from the Elohistic documents, notwithstanding that the said War Book "agrees very nearly in matter and style with the ground-text." Thus the case comes to this: the ground-text in Joshua agrees very nearly in matter and style with itself; but so far from this being an argument in the direction of unity of authorship, a new set of documents is imagined out of a difference which is acknowledged to be hardly a difference; and then an author called a "Jehovist," a country for him in which to form his style, and a suitable time in which he can write, are created with equal facility.

With very much respect for the learning and labour which have been expended in support of this theory, and in no way depreciating many valuable collateral results which the researches of those who have upheld it have produced, the theory itself is manifestly too vapid to convince many persons besides its authors. To most people, the statement of it will probably be a sufficient refutation. As has been remarked by Dr. Bliss, the English translator of Fay's Commentary, in the Lange Series: "The fancifulness and subjectivity of such elaborate and minute specifications, and the tenuity of many of the reasons assigned, provoke laughter rather than argumentative confutation. That one should gravely split a verse into numerous passages, so as to refer the various fragments to their respective authors, and should be obliged to do it to save his theory, is, to most minds, slaughtering the theory at its birth. Our curiosity is naturally raised by such attempts to imagine what the next speculator in Biblical criticism will propose for our wonderment; nay, we inquire what even the same mind, after having dropped for a time and forgotten the particulars of his previous fabrication, would invent, if he were to take up the whole subject anew."

Taking, then, the unity of the authorship of the book of Joshua as in no measure disproved or even shaken by this giddy theory, the date at which the book was written has an important bearing on the question of the interpolation of this passage from the book Jasher. Is the passage an interpolation made several centuries after the book was written, or is it merely a quotation made by the author himself? Not condescending to notice the sublime claim of Scripture to inspiration, Fay has adopted so much of Knobel's theory as to enable him to proceed as follows (the italics being his own): "*According to the view of the author of* 13 *b*—15, Jehovah has performed an *objective* astronomical miracle, of which *the poet* from whom the quotation is made, had no thought, *and of which we, following him* (*the poet*), *have no thought.*" This sentiment has been very recently repeated by the author of the Notes on Joshua in the Speaker's Commentary, who says, *in loco:* "We claim liberty to think with the poet who wrote in the book of Jasher the ode, of which a few words have come down to us, who did not dream of a literal standing still of the heavenly bodies, and to side with him rather than with the later writer who quotes him."

This argument of Fay's assumes that the author of the book of Joshua did not himself insert the quotation from the book Jasher. It further assumes that the person who inserted these verses in the text did not live sufficiently near to the time of the battle of Beth-horon to enable him to see, even so well as Fay sees in the nineteenth century, that the poetry had no historical basis of truth, but was merely poetry, and that of the most mythical kind, its air of fact to the contrary notwithstanding. In a word, for Fay's argument to be worth anything whatever, even outside the doctrine of inspiration, the Jehovist who inserted the verses must have lived at least two or three centuries after the battle, when all trustworthy traditions and accounts had so far faded into obscurity, that no one could contradict or correct his revised edition of "the Elohistic records." Looking at the tenacity with which the Jews preserved the accounts of their history, and at the exceedingly important character of this history, lying as it did at the foundation of both the national existence and the national theology,

it is almost incredible to suppose that even the seven centuries which intervened before the death of Hezekiah would have been sufficient to so completely blot out the accounts of such a battle as to allow, by the misinterpretation of an ancient poet's words, of the foisting into the sacred record of the most gigantic of all Old Testament miracles, when it was a miracle that never happened.

How then stands this other important question, touching the date of the book? Has Fay even a single century in which the battle could be so forgotten as to allow this account of a miracle, which it is said never took place, to have been written down by the author of the book of Joshua? Nothing has been advanced sufficient to prove it even probable that the book of Joshua had more than one author: did that one author of the book of Joshua live so far away from the time of the battle as to render it possible for him, irrespective of inspiration, to make so enormous an error? Till something substantial be advanced against his arguments, Keil must be held to have demonstrated that the book of Joshua was certainly written before the time of David, and probably by some member of the host which crossed the Jordan, the writer having seen at least some of the important events which he narrated (cf. chap. v. 1). It is impossible even to summarise these arguments here; those who are interested in the question should read them in full, and will probably find it no easy matter to answer them. (Cf. Keil's "Introduction," pp. 30—47.)

Taking it for granted, then, that the book of Joshua was written certainly as early as the days of Saul, and probably by one of the Israelites who had himself crossed the Jordan with Joshua, this interpolation theory is absolutely untenable. No writer in the time of Joshua, or even of the Judges, would have dared to foist into a history, of which the meanest Jew of the time would be sternly jealous, a story, poetical or otherwise, which gave serious impressions of a victory won mainly by means of an amazing miracle which everybody knew never took place. Thus, apart from what some still feel to be the very important considerations arising from the doctrine of Divine inspiration, this passage cannot reasonably be held to have been inserted by a more recent compiler of the book.

The only remaining view opposing the actual miracle, to which any weight seems to be attached by critics of the present time, is

**The theory which regards the passage as merely a poetical quotation made by the author of the book of Joshua.** This view has recently found a hearty advocate in Samuel Cox, the editor of the "Expositor," who holds that the entire passage (verses 12—15) is a poetical quotation, and who pronounces with an apparently untroubled confidence on the whole question: "No; there is no miracle recorded here." It is asserted by those who regard the entire passage as poetry that we must read it as poetry; and that in this light there is no more necessity for thinking of an actual prolongation of the day, because a poet has written of the sun standing still, than there is of interpreting the tropes literally when the Hebrew poets write of the hills and the mountains as "skipping," of the waters as "fleeing," of the trees of the field as "clapping their hands," or of the stars in their courses "fighting against Sisera."

The following remarks may be placed against this entire theory:—

1. Even if the whole of the verses were admitted to be a poetical quotation, they must still have a foundation in truth, so real as to require the miracle just as much as prosaic history would require it. Given that the book of Joshua was written by one living near to the time of these events, and there is still an amount of quietly told fact in the record, of which, with ever so liberal a margin for the figurative language of poetry, no account whatever is given. Unless we irreverently impugn the truth of the history, several things will still be left as a residuum in the crucible, which this process of poetical evaporation does not in any way touch; what is more, this residuum of insoluble fact is so important, that it will require as much miracle to account for its presence as would be required if the whole record were prosaic history. Given that the account as it

stands was written, say within two or three centuries of the event, and it will still have to be felt that Joshua offered a prayer for something (verses 12, 14); that Joshua offered this prayer in the presence of the army; that the words, "he said in the sight of all Israel," shew that many of the people knew of the prayer at the time when it was offered; that Joshua's prayer was answered by God as the army might have desired; and that the Israelites had never known a day which had so witnessed to the power of prayer. These are so many facts for which the theory of poetical hyperbole in no way accounts. It does not even begin to depreciate their historical value. Indeed, this poetical theory has altogether overlooked the fact that, *to the author of the book of Joshua, the most conspicuous feature of the day was, not the wonderful miracle, but the miracle as a wonderful answer to prayer.* Certifying us, unconsciously to himself, of the depth of his pious perception, and thus giving us an incidental guarantee of godliness and truth, the author finds the wonder of the day even more in the graciousness of God than in the power of God. Never before in the history of Israel, not even at the Red Sea, had there been such a day for answering prayer as this day. The important fourteenth verse is in no way affected by the plea about hyperbole.

2. The claim to discount the historical value of the passage on the ground of figurative language is in itself exceedingly weak. As has been noticed above, the passage has been compared to the figures used by other Hebrew poets; and then it has been argued that as figures elsewhere are merely figurative, this is only figurative language,—which is simply a *petitio principii.* The difficulty, moreover, still remains, that in reading the phrases, "He bowed the heavens and came down," "the mountains skipped," "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera," etc., the reader never thinks of interpreting literally, while here, till he has calculated the difficulty of the miracle, it does not so much as occur to him to explain figuratively. With far too much candour to serve his argument, Mr. Cox says successively, after his somewhat threadbare instances of comparison: "We are in no danger of insisting, or of hearing sceptical men of science insist, that these figures must be taken in a literal sense;" "We do not even pause to ask in what sense we are to understand David's words" (Ps. xviii. 9, 16); "No such miracle (Judges v. 20) has ever been imagined." Exactly so. But a miracle has been almost universally imagined in this matter at Beth-horon. The conclusion is unavoidable: the cases are not parallel.

3. It is very unlikely that all four of these verses are quotation. They may be all poetical, although critics are not agreed on this; it would not follow, if all were poetical, that they were necessarily from the book Jasher. The great difficulty in believing that the whole of the verses are from the book Jasher is that the formula of citation stands right in the middle of the supposed quotation. The author of the book of Joshua is thus made to awkwardly break off in the midst of a short extract to tell us from whence the extract was obtained. This is done in no other instance of a similar kind throughout the Scriptures. In 2 Sam. i. 17—27, containing the only other extract from the book Jasher, the order stands thus: a poetical stanza by David, then the formula of citation, and finally the song itself. May not this be the true order of these four verses in Joshua? If so, it would stand as follows: (*a*) the rhythmical introduction by the author of the book of Joshua, telling us of the prayer offered; (*b*) Joshua's apostrophe to the sun, which might naturally, as an apostrophe, have been spoken in a poetic form, but if not so spoken, might have been so rendered by the author of our book, who cannot be held bound to have given the *ipsissima verba* of Joshua; (*c*) the formula of citation; (*d*) the poetical (*or prose*) quotation from the book Jasher, including verse 15, which the historian repeats exactly at verse 43. It is generally supposed that the quotation from the book Jasher is that which is given *before* the formula of citation, and that the historian's comment follows; but this makes the difficulty of accounting for the fifteenth verse, and its position, almost insuperable. In view of this, the order as given above has been suggested,

although this in no way affects the conclusion that the theory which regards all of the four verses as from the book of Jasher cannot be maintained. One thing seems pretty clear: that the very jubilant tone in which scientific sceptics have been bidden to hold their peace about this "enormous and exorbitant miracle," on the ground that the Bible records no such miracle, is somewhat misplaced, and is altogether unworthy of the excellent writer who has long rendered such valuable service in Scripture exposition. Had he considered the matter with his usual care, he would probably have found reason to suspect that several of the German writers had fallen back on a theory of interpolation so late as the days of Hezekiah, because the theory of entire poetry, inserted by any one living near to the time of Joshua, was altogether too weak to be seriously argued. Probably it is, on the whole, the least satisfastory explanation of the passage which has ever been offered.

It only remains to take into consideration, as briefly as possible,

**The theory of an actual prolongation of the day by the miraculous interposition of Jehovah.** Did the miracle of an extension of the day actually take place? These verses seem to say so. This is the first impression we all have on reading them. If the daylight were not miraculously prolonged, there is much in the passage which is utterly inexplicable. Keil's view—that the prayer was for a satisfactory termination of the battle before sunset, and that instead of the day being lengthened the victory was hastened—is not at all in accordance with the natural impressions arising from the narrative. Besides this, it makes the fourteenth verse not only meaningless, but false. If the only answer to prayer was an expediting of the battle, then there had been days of answering prayer obviously greater than this day. Who would hesitate to call greater the day of Abraham's prayer for Sodom, or that of Moses' prayer at Pi-hahiroth? The fourteenth verse plainly alludes not only to a marvellous, but also to *a manifest* answer to prayer. If Joshua prayed *after the storm began to smite the Canaanites*, and this is the order of the narrative, there was too little of manifest answer to prayer to account for the fourteenth verse.

The reality of the miracle is further thrown into prominence by a feature which seems to have escaped notice. Comparing these four verses with the immediately preceding miracle, recorded in the eleventh verse, we are driven to ask, If the day were not miraculously prolonged, how is it that the incident of verses 12—15 has so taken precedence of the incident of verse 11? There was a miracle also in the hailstorm; it was miraculously timed, and miraculously made to follow and smite down Canaanites, while it did no harm to the immediately pursuing Israelites. If the day were not prolonged, how is it that some lesser miracle, if any, has so utterly absorbed attention from what would then be this greater miracle of the hailstorm? The interest gathers round, not this marvellously guided hail, but about what was so wonderful that the lesser wonder of the hail was lost in some greater wonder. What could that greater theme for praise have been, if it were not this miraculously extended day?

Scripture elsewhere seems to give some testimony to this miraculous extension of the day. Isaiah xviii. 21 may or may not refer to the lengthening of the day. The reference may be to David's victory at Gibeon (2 Sam. v. 25; 1 Chron. xiv. 16); or it may be to this triumph through Joshua. But if the reference were certainly to the victory won by Joshua, the allusion to the rising up of Jehovah in wrath might be accounted for by the storm of hailstones. This passage therefore, while it harmonises well with the greater miracle, *proves* nothing. Very different is the force of the allusion in Hab. iii. 11. Notwithstanding Keil's criticism, that the historical reference is "disproved by the grammatically incorrect and really trivial arguments" advanced in support of it—an opinion since substantially adopted by Fay, Thornley Smith, and others—it is by no means proved that Habakkuk does not celebrate this wonderful work of Jehovah. The words used by Habakkuk are, "*Shĕmĕsh y rēăch' 'āmăd z'vūlāh.*" Keil says of them: "The

literal meaning is, 'Sun and moon have entered into their habitation.'" He adds, by way of comment, "and hence the expression denotes not even their actual setting, but a darkening of the sun and moon, resembling their setting." But Habakkuk says nothing whatever of this "darkening;" that is simply the judgment of Keil. Accepting his translation, but not his comment, the idea of a prolongation of the day is rather established than overthrown. Gesenius renders "*z'vūl*," "*habitation*," "*residence*." The Jews, so far as they defined the matter at all, believed in the old phenomenal view, afterwards systematised by Ptolemy, that the sun travelled round the earth. Quite in accordance with the bold hyperbole of Hebrew poetry, Habakkuk vigorously describes both sun and moon as having entered into temporary residence; *i.e.*, they tabernacled in the heavens; they took up their abode, or habitation, in the firmament. Contrary to their supposed continual motion round the earth, they entered into habitation till the victory was won. Thus Keil's translation simply emphasises and beautifies the poetry, and gives no room whatever for the notion that Habakkuk alludes to some darkening of the sun resembling an eclipse. Apart from the translation, the nature and order of the passage in Habakkuk strongly tend to the assurance that he alludes to the phenomenon at Beth-horon. The verses from 3 to 10 graphically depict the wonders at Sinai, at the Red Sea, in the wilderness, and at the passage of the Jordan; the verses 11, 12, 13, depict in natural order, as a continuance of the record, the overthrow of the Canaanites under Joshua. The very allusion to the sun and moon in such a connection would be strong enough to establish the reference to the battle of Beth-horon, even if the language of Habakkuk were far less clear.

In addition to the passage in Habakkuk, it should not be forgotten that direct reference is made to this miracle, as an historical event, in the Apocrypha. Thus we read in Ecclus. xlvi. 4, of Joshua, "Did not the sun go back by his means? and was not one day as long as two?" Homer, Ovid, and other classical writers of antiquity, unless credit is to be given to them for a larger amount of imagination, not to say wilder fancy, than seems necessary or fair, must be held to have had some acquaintance, in a traditional form, with the event recorded in Joshua. Part of Dr. Kitto's reference may be quoted. After speaking of a Chinese tradition, he remarks: "Herodotus also says that he learned from the Egyptian priests, that within the period of 341 generations the sun had four times deviated from his common course, setting twice where he usually rises, and rising twice where he usually sets. It is useless to expect minute accuracy in these old traditions; but to what else can they refer than to some derangement in the apparent course of the sun, that is, in the actual motion of the earth? The story of Phaeton, and some other classical fables, seems to have reference to the same event. In the poets, also, there are allusions of a similar character, which would probably never have been imagined but from some general tradition that such a circumstance had at one time occurred. In Homer there are not less than three passages to this purport. In one Agamemnon prays:—

> "Almighty Father! glorious above all!
> Cloud-girt, who dwell'st in heaven, Thy throne sublime!
> Let not the sun go down, and night approach,
> Till Priam's roof fall flat into the flames," etc.

Again, Jupiter having promised the Trojans that they should prevail until the sun went down, Juno, who was favourable to their adversaries, made the sun go down before its time:—

> "Majestic Juno sent the sun,
> Unwearied minister of light, although
> Reluctant, down into the ocean stream."

And, finally, Minerva retarded the rising of the sun, in order to prolong that great night in which Ulysses slew the suitors, and discovered himself to Penelope:—

"Minerva checked
Night's almost finished course, and held, meantime,
The golden dawn close pris'ner in the deep;
Forbidding her to lead her coursers forth,
Lampas and Phaëthon, that furnish light
For all mankind.'" [*Illust. Fam. Bib., in loc.*]

If references like these do not of themselves suggest a common tradition from which they must have originated, we who are familiar with the history in the book of Joshua can hardly avoid feeling that they are contributive towards establishing as a fact that extension of the day which the history seems to record.

Not nearly sufficient stress has been laid on the object for which the miracle was apparently wrought. Most writers on the subject have hastily concluded that the *only* object for this phenomenal staying of the sun and moon was to give Joshua time for a completer victory. That was part of the Divine purpose, no doubt; but did that embrace all? Did it make up even half of that which Jehovah had in view? Was not the main purpose of the miracle to dishonour the sun and moon as objects of the idolatrous worship of the Canaanites? (Cf. the closing remarks in the following outline on "The Victory of Faith.") It is only on some such ground as this that any reason whatever can be found for Joshua's command concerning the moon. It was certainly not essential that the moon should stay above the horizon for the purpose of giving light. The ordinary light of the sun would be sufficient without that, and would receive no perceptible addition by having the moon for an auxiliary. But if the "sun-god" Baal was to be degraded by being shewn to be subservient to the command of Joshua, it naturally followed that the "moon-goddess" Ashtoreth should be similarly degraded also.

We therefore conclude that the teaching of the Scripture is that the day was actually prolonged, and that it was prolonged in response to the prayer of Joshua, offered in an outburst of strong and simple trust, in the heat and emergency of the battle.

The question yet remains, In what manner was the miracle performed? With this feature of the case we confess we have little concern. The inquiry may be both natural and interesting, but it is not important. The day may have been extended by means of refraction, as was long since suggested by Grotius. In view of the Divine principle of economising power, this method of performing the miracle seems the most reasonable and probable. But if we grant omnipotence, and if our faith in that be real, and not the mere article of a creed, the process of staying the rotation of the earth, and of preventing all the harmful consequences which would otherwise naturally ensue, would be *as easy to God as anything else.* Omnipotence, if it be that at all, can know no effort. Finally, for those who are interested by this part of the question, May not the direction of the earth's axis have been shifted? The battle probably took place in the summer, when, even in the middle of the natural night, Gibeon, as situated at nearly 32° north latitude, would not be depressed very far below the horizon. If the north pole were gradually shifted towards the sun, and made to move slightly in a circle of elevation and depression, a very small displacement would keep Gibeon above the horizon all night, and in the morning, at the time for ordinary sunrise at Gibeon, the earth would have assumed its usual position of $23\frac{1}{2}°$ inclination in the ecliptic. This, of course, would have the effect of dropping one night at Gibeon altogether, and of allowing the ordinary rotation of the earth to go on as usual, the only difference being the gradual shifting and return of the inclination of the earth's axis. As to any influence which this movement might have upon the waters of the earth, that part of the question is answered by omnipotence. The suggestion is simply made in view of the feeling which must impress all careful students of Scripture, that God's way in the working of miracles is to economise force rather

than to display it; and that the entire cessation of the earth's revolution would shew an interposition of Divine power which seems, to even believing men, so gigantic as to contradict in some measure that reservation of force usually shewn in the miraculous working of God, as set before us in other parts of the Scriptures.

It should not be forgotten that, not simply in this miracle, but in all miracles, the questions of how they are wrought, and which of any two requires most power, are utterly beyond our capacity to answer. How was life brought back into the body of dead Lazarus? How was the bread multiplied in the hands of the disciples? How was the water changed into wine? What laws had, for the time, to be suspended; what new forces set in motion? Which of these miracles was most miraculous? Even if the revolution of the earth on its axis actually ceased in response to Joshua's prayer, which miracle was the greater, the "standing still of the sun and moon," or the feeding of the five thousand by Christ? Which of us knows? If we are not prepared to let go our faith in the miracles altogether, we shall do well to guard against the naturally strong temptation which too readily besets most of us, to explain them away, or tone them down, as we become oppressed by what seems to us their unusual magnitude. Unfortunately this, too, is one of the temptations that are continuous; and when, driven on by sceptical laughter, we have ever so conscientiously explained away the miracles which are "enormous and exorbitant," and have secured as the heritage left to our faith the "lesser miracles," which we deem becoming to the Scriptures; then others will probably be tempted to take up the case where we have left it, and proceed to demonstrate that the giving of sight to the man born blind, of elasticity to the ligaments of her who was bowed with an infirmity for eighteen years, or the withering up of the barren fig tree, were even greater miracles than this phenomenal staying of the sun and moon. None of us should dare to believe, as the teaching of Scripture, what Scripture does not say; most of us have need to guard our expositions of Divine truth from the unconscious yet none the less injurious influence of our too easily weakened faith.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 12—15.

### The Victory of Faith.

John says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." This triumph at Beth-horon is hardly less owing to faith than was the triumph of the Israelites at Jericho.

Consider—

**I. The life of faith in the greatness of its emergencies.** 1. *Believing men by no means escape emergencies.* Life is full of them. Every realm of duty discovers them. They confront us when we seek to aid our fellows. Joshua was here aiding the Gibeonites. They meet us as we seek to obey the commands of God. So far from being exempt from them as we do the will of God, it is here that they seem most plentiful and most severe. 2. *The emergencies of believing men are God-given opportunities for faith.* The proverb tells us that, "Necessity is the mother of invention." Necessity which is beyond the capacity of human wit or power to meet is not seldom the mother of faith. 3. *God often times and measures the necessities of His people so as to tempt their faith.* Joshua was fast gaining the victory. The hail was giving witness of Divine help. Yet the light was threatening too speedy a departure to allow of complete victory. Unless Heaven helped more fully, many would escape, and to a great extent the battle would have to be fought over again. Why might not Jehovah, already so manifestly making the battle His own, help yet more? Thus the very crisis entices trust: "*Then* spake Joshua to the Lord," *etc.* **II. The life of faith in the boldness of its requests.** 1. *Faith, like love, cannot wait for precedents.* No

prayer like this had ever been offered before. The chronicles of prayer shewed nothing approaching this. As the woman who wept on Christ's feet, and wiped away the tears with her hair, shews us love which never thought of staying to ask if that kind of thing had ever been done before; so Joshua shews us a faith which forgets all but God's power and love, and Israel's need. Faith is not empirical; it acts from given principles which have been accepted by the heart, rather than from the proofs which are written in history. He who only suffers his faith to imitate that of some one else will win little renown among spiritually minded men, and obtain little blessing from God. Faith is essentially spontaneous, and independent of men, and is always weak when imitative. 2. *Faith cannot be limited by difficulties.* It begins by granting a might which is omnipotent and a love which is infinite, and then simply speaks as moved by its necessities. **III. The life of faith in its prevalence with God.** 1. *They who trust shall never "be confounded," no matter for what they trust.* When God promises to answer prayer, He never stipulates beforehand to know the nature of the prayer. This sublime feature runs through the entire Bible. Men inquire about the thing which they are asked to promise; God simply inquires about the kind of spirit which asks. 2. *What some would think the extravagancies of faith, the Scriptures occasionally guarantee God's acceptance of, by giving us instances in kind.* Christ certifies that the very mountains should be at the command of faith. If some adequate necessity required the removal of a mountain, and occasion were thus given for a faith that should deal with a reality, and not with an experiment; then, on the exercise of faith, the Saviour assures us that the mountain should be removed. So this seemingly extravagant request of Joshua's is put before us to shew that with a need that is real, and a heart that asks unquestioningly, God answers without any respect whatever to the magnitude of our petitions. **IV. The life of faith in the thoroughness of its victories over error.** 1. *The idolaters themselves were utterly overthrown.* 2. *The objects of their idolatry were placed at the command of the enemies of idolatry.* The Canaanites, like the Phœnicians, worshipped Baal and Ashtoreth. This worship was closely connected with the adoration of the heavenly bodies. Baal by some has been identified as the "Sun-god," while Ashtoreth, it is thought, was worshipped as the "Moon-goddess." "There can be no doubt that the general notion symbolised by Ashtoreth is that of productive power, as Baal symbolises that of generative power; and it would be natural to conclude that as the sun is the great symbol of the latter, and therefore to be identified with Baal, so the moon is the symbol of the former, and must be identified with Ashtoreth. That this goddess was so typified can scarcely be doubted. At any rate it is certain that she was by some ancient writers identified with the moon." [*Smith's Dict.*] The commanding of the sun and the moon to stand still thus becomes profoundly significant. Just as the miracles of Moses were directed "against all the gods of Egypt," so does this miracle in answer to the prayer of Joshua demean the gods of the Canaanites before the eyes of all concerned. The sun and moon, which had so long been worshipped, were shewn to be at the *command* of Joshua; the deities which the idolaters had adored were bidden by a man to stay, and to give their light while the idolaters were slain. This, it may be remarked, affords, in the light of the plagues of Egypt, presumptive evidence of the reality of the miracle itself, and shews, what for the purposes of the battle is somewhat obscure, why the moon was addressed as well as the sun. As objects of worship, these symbols of idolatry should be degraded in the sight of both the Canaanites and the Israelites (cf. Deut. iv. 19). So thorough is the victory of truth; so complete is the triumph of the man who, in unquestioning faith, fights for the God of truth.

## OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

ESSENTIAL ACCOMPANIMENTS OF FAITH.

**I. He only believes well who works well.** Joshua had hastened up against this confederacy of Canaanites as though the entire burden of the battle lay on the men who were to fight it. It is the man who labours thus diligently that believes thus fully.

**II. He alone can rightly believe in God's word, who is very jealous of his own word.** Joshua had kept faith most conscientiously with the Gibeonites. In all that in which he had excited their hopes he met them with strict integrity. The hope of a trusting heart was a sacred thing to him. This is the man who, remembering that God had said, "I will not fail thee," dared to believe that every hope which such words had encouraged would be sacredly honoured by God. A lack of integrity *in our hearts* towards men will assuredly work within us a proportionately weak trust in God. It is he who honours every hope which he has caused in the bosoms of others, who is best prepared to cry for himself, "Stablish Thy word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused him to hope."

**III. He best believes in Divine help for the penitent, who himself has compassion for the penitent.** The penitence of the Gibeonites seems to have been very poor. Whatever may have been its motives, and however low its manifestation, Joshua seems really to have been glad to spare these men who pleaded for mercy, even though they came with lies upon their lips. It was easy for such a man to feel, "Can I be more merciful than God? If I find pleasure in hastening to save them from their foes, must not God be even more interested in their deliverance?"

**IV. He most fully believes in the overthrow of error, who has long learned to hate error.** Joshua had long shewn far more than a mere love for the cause of the Israelites. He had shewn a hatred of unbelief as seen in the ten spies, and of sin as manifested in Achan. We seldom hear him speak without feeling how deep is his love for the truth. He who thus hates evil himself has little difficulty in believing that God hates it more, and that He will spare no work to overthrow it.

**V. He who would believe that nothing is too hard for the Lord must walk very much with the Lord.** Joshua had not only proved the might of the Divine arm, but the love of the Divine heart. He walked in sympathy with God, and in joy in God. This is the man who dared to say, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon."

THE POETICAL CELEBRATION OF THE MIGHTY WORKS OF THE LORD.

God's mighty works should be perpetuated in song. They should be chronicled, not only in language which can inform the mind, but in words adapted to move the heart. They should be written down in the natural language of joy and praise. Poetry is the smile of the fair face of literature, while logic, in its sterner procedure and heavier forms, more nearly resembles the frown. God's gladdening works of deliverance are not so much things to be argued about, as mercies to be sung.

"A BELIEVING WORD OF JOSHUA.

1. Spoken under what circumstances? 2. How intended? 3. How answered?

THE GREAT DAY AT GIBEON.

It was great: 1. Through the mighty strife of the combatants. 2. Through the courageous faith of the general. 3. Through the victory which God gave."—[*Fay; Lange's Com.*]

"It is a good care how we may not anger God; it is a vain study how we may fly from His judgments when we have angered Him.

"God's glory was that which Joshua aimed at: he knew that all the world must needs be witnesses of that which the eye of the world stood still to see."—[*Bp. Hall.*]

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 16—28.

### After the Victory.

**I. The workers of iniquity vainly attempting to hide themselves.** "The five kings fled, and hid themselves in a cave at Makkedah." Fancy the thoughts which must have filled their minds during the time in which they lay undiscovered. These were the first moments of quiet which they had known for at least two or three days. With what absolute amazement must they have surveyed the dreadful events of the few preceding hours! The change was positively awful both in its completeness and in its suddenness. It must have seemed like a dream. Only a few hours before, Adoni-zedec had sent out his summons for help. Hoham, and Piram, and Japhia, and Debir, had at once mustered their forces, and marched to join the king of Jerusalem. That done, they had proceeded, the evening before, to invest Gibeon. The day was too far advanced to commence operations; so they would wait till the morrow. With the morning light, the army of Joshua burst upon them. The attack was so sudden and so terrible, that panic and slaughter and flight took the place of battle. Then came the awful and destroying storm—huge hailstones which seemed hurled from the hand of an angry God, touching no Israelite, and sparing no Canaanite. Verily Jehovah must be fighting against them. At that stage their one hope must have been in the darkness. Would not the sun and moon, whom they had so often worshipped, hide their light, and thus facilitate the escape of their votaries? Alas! no. The hours passed on, but both sun and moon stood still in the heavens, as though at once to witness and aid in their destruction. How these thoughts, and many similar, must have chased through the minds of the five kings as they gained the welcome silence of the cave near Makkedah! And then, while they indulged in the hope that they had personally escaped, suddenly voices were heard at the cave's mouth; some of their enemies appeared, and gazed on their five crouching forms; then a messenger entered, and the Israelites withdrew, rolling, however, great stones upon the cave's mouth, and setting a guard outside. Thus once more the kings were left to darkness and silence, and this time to reflect sadly on the certainty of coming death. 1. *They hide vainly, who seek to hide from God.* (Cf. Gen. iii. 8; Job xxvi. 6; Ps. cxxxix. 7—10; Jer. xxiii. 24.) 2. *They hide too late, who hide after God's hand is stretched forth against them.* (Cf. Amos ix. 1—3.) 3. *Only they hide well, who hide* IN *God.* The Gibeonites had done this, and though they had done it singly, and thus brought upon them a confederate army, they were perfectly safe. The five kings had tried to hide *from* God, and they had failed utterly. Happy is he who can seek refuge in the Rock of Ages, and there say in the joy of conscious safety, "Thou art my hiding-place." (Cf. Ps. xvii. 8; xxvii. 5.) **II. The servants of the Lord concerning themselves with tokens of Divine favour rather than with their prostrate foes** (ver. 19). These God-aided Israelites are calm in the very heat of a most exciting victory. Joshua thinks, not of vengeance, but of fulfilling to the utmost the commandment of the Lord. More than this, Joshua looks upon the captured kings not merely as enemies to be killed, but as witnesses of God's further help in triumphing over enemies yet left. He sees in the captive kings one more token that God will give him the victory over enemies yet unsubdued: "The Lord your God hath delivered them into your hand." **III. The victories of the Lord as bringing to His people, sooner or later, perfect peace from their enemies.** "None moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel" (ver. 21). When the Lord fought for His people in Egypt, it was with the same result (Exod. xi. 7). How complete will be the peace of God's children in their final triumph! Then, indeed, "the beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety." **IV. Men, once prominent in sin, suffering in conspicuous shame and peculiar punishment** (verses 22—27). 1. *The five kings were not suffered to die as their people died.* No one of them fell in the battle. The hail, also, spared them each. They who lead in iniquity must expect to be foremost

in punishment. 2. *The five kings were made in their degradation the sign of the triumphs yet to come* (verses 24, 25). This was not mere cruelty. Although a customary usage of the time, it was also something more. It was significant of other victories, and was meant to encourage the Israelites: "Thus shall the Lord do," *etc.* V. The wrath of godly men displaying itself, not in vindictive passion and heedless malice, but calmly, and in view of law and justice. (Compare verses 26, 27; Deut. xxi. 22, 23.) Nothing is more imposing in this terrible mission entrusted to the Israelites, than the solemn and judicial spirit in which it is continually executed. In the very heat and excitement of battle the leaders of Israel steadily maintain the character of God's servants, and act with the calm demeanour of judges. So far is the spirit of Joshua from offering any excuse for the vindictive zeal which has sometimes been shewn by Christians, that it intensely condemns it. Joshua never forgets that judgment belongs unto the Lord, and that he is merely the Lord's servant, charged with a terrible and unusual mission.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 16—18. THE WORKERS OF INIQUITY HIDING THEMSELVES.

I. Like the five kings, wicked men, in times of danger, hide themselves. 1. *The wicked often hide themselves by seclusion.* They come not to the light, lest their deeds be reproved. 2. *The wicked seek to hide themselves by deceit.* Although appearing among men, they strive to conceal themselves from men. 3. *The wicked sometimes endeavour to hide themselves by false professions of religion.* The sacred name of Christ is used as a mask. Even behind the cross, and the form of the agonised Saviour dying thereon, do the wicked try to hide, sinning without remorse so long as they seem to be sinning without danger. 4. *The wicked, who have practised hiding all their lives, will still feel the need of hiding when God begins to move towards them in judgment.* They will feel the need of hiding more than ever then. "The kings of the earth . . . hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains. And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" II. Like the five kings, they who seek to hide from God will utterly fail. (Cf. preceding outline.) 1. *They will hide in vain, who try to hide from God.* "There is a recent application of electricity, by which, under the influence of its powerful light, the body can be so illuminated that the workings beneath the surface of the skin can be distinctly seen. Lift up the hand, and it will become almost translucent, the bones and veins clearly appearing. It is so in some sort with God's introspection of the human heart. His eye, which shines brighter than the sun, searches us and discovers all our weakness and infirmity." [*J. G. Pilkington.*] 2. *They hide too late, who hide after God's hand is stretched out for judgment.* 3. *They only hide safely and well, who hide in God.* God graciously invites us to hide in Himself (Isa. xxvi. 20, 21). Let us respond in the trust of David, who, when hunted by Saul into another cave, cried unto his God: "In the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast."

Verse 19. FIRST PRINCIPLES IN CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

The directions here given by Joshua for this battle with living and personal foes indicate principles which are no less appropriate and important in our conflicts with evil and sinful habits. We shall do well in the battle of life to remind ourselves of the following things:—

I. All the victory of the past should be used as an encouragement for the present. "Stay ye not, but pursue after your enemies." Past triumphs are not merely for thanksgiving. The victories of yesterday are

to be strength for to-day. Sin should be pursued and smitten in the hours of its weakness. Sin should on no account be left to take up its abode within us. We may spare it in its weakness, and presently find it too strong for us. "Use is second nature;" thus sin which has become a habit is an enemy in a fortified place. Sin may entrench itself behind our holiest passions and noblest services. Pride gets behind Christian work. Love of self conceals and fortifies itself behind what we call love for souls. Victory is to be utilized for new victories. **II. All the victory of the past is by the Lord, and should assure us of the Lord's help for the future.** As Joshua thought of the help of Jehovah in the hail storm, and in the miracle which extended the day, he could not but say of the enemies which yet remained, "The Lord your God hath delivered them into your hand." We may well argue thus in sight of our spiritual victories, and in the presence of spiritual enemies which remain unsubdued. 1. *Every past triumph over sin gives evidence of Divine help.* "Without me ye can do nothing." This was true at the beginning of our conflict. 2. *Every instance of Divine help in the past should assure us of God's willingness to help in the future.* God's help yesterday is a prophecy and a promise for to-day. The Lord "changes not." 3. *The continuance of Divine help must lead to complete and final victory.* Every real triumph of the soldiers of the cross should become to them "an earnest of the future possession." Thus verse 21 indicates, so far as concerns this battle, a victory which was so complete that no one ventured in any way to molest the victors.

Verse 25. THE SONG OF FAITH.

I. An old song. The "new song" is not till the battles are all ended. This is the theme with which the book opens. The song of faith is a fugue, running off, as throughout this book, now in one direction, and now in another, but continually returning to its theme. (Cf. chapters i. 6, 9; viii. 1; x. 8, 25; xi. 6; xxiii. 5, 6.) The song of faith is not merely the repetition of a single life, but a repetition from one life to another. This assuring utterance was repeated from Abraham (Gen. xv. 1) to Isaac (Gen. xxvi. 2—4), and Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 13—15), and Moses (Exod. ii. 12); it was reiterated by Moses to Joshua (Deut. xxxi. 6, 23), and by Joshua, again and again, to all Israel. Thus it becomes the established song of the children of faith. It is sung now by David (1 Chron. xxiii. 13, xxviii. 20), and repeatedly to or by his successors, till the angels repeat it to the trembling women at the empty tomb of the Saviour. It is sounded encouragingly into the ears of the "little flock" by Christ on earth, and, not less, is given to cheer disciples by Christ from heaven (Rev. i. 17, 18). This "Fear not" of the Church of the O. T. is also the song of the Church of the N. T. It is the national anthem in the kingdom of heaven upon earth, and will only give place to the new song before the throne of God. **II. An old song, but one to be ever rendered with new meanings.** The trials and triumphs in each singer's life are to give it a new significance. To Abraham its music would be interpreted by visions and gracious words; to Moses, by mighty miracles; to Joshua, by wonderful victories; and so to every child of God, by his own peculiar mercies and triumphs. Thus, though the song is ever the same, it has its individuality of sweetness and harmony to every particular singer. **III. An old song, the meaning of which is to be more and more incorporated into our life.** 1. *It can only be learned by the believer.* It is said of the new song, "No man could learn that song" but those who were "redeemed from the earth." None but the heart of faith can "Fear not, and be of good courage" at all times. Not to fear is to believe. 2. *It can only be learned gradually, even by him who does believe.* Hence the significance of the repetition of this word throughout the book of Joshua. Every new triumph is to be turned into a little more trust. 3. *He who best learns it will most, even while yet on*

*earth, enter into the peace of heaven.* "We which have believed do enter into rest." Thus the song of faith is to contribute to a life of faith.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE PARAGRAPH.*—Verses 29—43.*

Verse 30. Of Makkedah and Libnah, and of the remaining cities whose destruction is recorded in this chapter, it is particularly said that Joshua smote "all the souls that were therein." Joshua did this under the special and emphatic commandment of the Lord. In the overthrow of Jericho, in the hail storm and the miraculous extension of the day at Beth-horon, God made this war *manifestly His own*. These solemn records seem to have a special claim to notice, and a peculiar value at the present time. In days when so many are disposed to make the wrath of the Lord unreal, we shall do well to remember that this wrath has a history. It is not merely a doctrine of that which is to come; it is also recorded as that which has been. When the arguments which go to depreciate the anger of Jehovah have been urged to the utmost, these terrible histories will still remain. If they serve to warn any who are too prone to believe in unlimited mercy, and thus to bring them to Him through whom alone mercy is proclaimed, they will prove, as undoubtedly they will, that they also are a part of the good tidings of the God of love.

Some men are typical both in sin and punishment. They are ensamples unto them who believe *not*. Thus, for the second time, we read of these acts of Joshua, "as he did unto the king of Jericho." Great grace causes some men to be known as pillars of the Church; great infamy in the rejection of grace makes the names of others to become by-words in the way of wickedness.

Verse 33. It is not enough to help men; we must help them in the way of righteousness. Compassion and sympathy may be misplaced, and may but lead to ruin. Sin has its patriots and its volunteers, as well as righteousness. How hard is the yoke of Satan, under which even generous service, like this rendered by Horam, leads to death! how easy is the yoke of Christ, where even a cup of cold water, given in the name and spirit of a disciple, shall in no wise lose its reward!

Verses 36, 37. PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.

**I. The fame of the past has no guarantee against degradation in the present.** A great history of godly names, even in these early days, already stood connected with Hebron. The city itself was famed for its antiquity (Numb. xiii. 22); better still, the names of holy men of old were associated with its history. Nearly four hundred and seventy years before, Abraham came and dwelt here, and fifty years after his settlement he purchased of Ephron the Hittite the field of Machpelah. Here Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah, were all buried. Not far from Hebron was Mamre, beneath the famous terebinth of which Abraham had entertained the angels unawares. Near to this very Hebron Abraham had poured forth his holy prayer for Sodom, and long before that he had built in the outskirts of the city an altar to the Lord (Gen. xviii., xiii. 18). Formerly the place was redolent of God; now it was the seat of an abominable idolatry. This degeneration which stands associated with a city, is no less true of individual men. No man can afford to rely on his past. That which has been offers but small assurance of that which will be.

* We are now entering on a part of this book in which many passages occur not likely to be chosen as texts for sermons. Some of these, like the remaining verses of this chapter, are brief historical chronicles; others are merely geographical records. Verses of this description can hardly be thought suitable for any extended homiletic treatment, and will be dealt with principally in brief comments, or only in the "Critical Notes."

II. The degradation of the present is no sufficient reason for despairing of an honourable future. 1. *Hebron again became great.* It was given as an inheritance to one of the godliest of the Israelites (chap. xv. 13), and was made one of the six cities of refuge (chap. xx. 7). Later in the history it became the capital from which David ruled over Judah for seven years and a half (2 Sam. ii. 11). Under the guidance of men like Caleb and David, Hebron would have often resounded with the voice of prayer and praise, instead of echoing to the orgies of the old idolatry. 2. *Hebron became great and honourable only through the intervention of God.* It is because God is merciful, and loves to interpose His saving arm, that there is hope even for "the dark places of the earth which are full of the habitations of cruelty." It is because of this Divine mercy that no degraded man need despair of himself, and no good man of the most degraded community.

III. The honourable history of the past should stimulate us in attempting to redeem the present. Right before these Israelites, as they pressed upon Hebron in the battle, was the cave of Machpelah, wherein lay the bodies of the fathers and mothers of all the host of Israel. Dean Stanley says, "The cave of Machpelah is concealed, beyond all reasonable doubt, by the mosque at Hebron. . . . . And marvellous, too, to think that within the massive enclosure of that mosque lies possibly, not merely the last dust of Abraham and Isaac, but the very body—the mummy—the embalmed bones of Jacob, brought in solemn state from Egypt to this (as it then was) lonely and beautiful spot." [*Sinai and Palestine*, pp. 149, 102.] At the time of this assault on the city, no mosque covered the cave; but there, close by these Israelites in their strife, was the cave, and in the cave all that was left of the bodies of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How the very thought of that, doubtless made known to them all, must have nerved their arms for the fight! In his "Lays of Ancient Rome," Macaulay has made Horatius ask with thrilling patriotism,

> "And how can man die better
> Than facing fearful odds
> For the ashes of his fathers
> And the temples of his gods?"

Similarly must these warriors of Israel have been moved against their foes, as they pressed upon them at Hebron. Every man in the army of Joshua might feel that the grave of the fathers of all the host was almost beneath his feet; and as to the religious inspiration, the place all around was sacred by the prayers of Abraham, the altar of Mamre had stood hard by, and the very God whom Abraham had worshipped there now bade these children of Abraham to "be of good courage, and fear not." While the history of the past is insufficient, in itself, to keep us, yet should the memories and traditions of what has been greatly honourable make us thirst to see old glory re-established. To a true heart, "Ichabod" should be nothing less than a trumpet call to earnest prayer and holy strife.

IV. The victory of to-day gives no certain promise of peace to-morrow. Caleb had this city of Hebron to take a second time (chap. xv. 14; Judges i. 10). No sooner had Joshua withdrawn than the fugitive Canaanites seem to have re-established themselves in the city. This was the case in other towns taken by the Israelites. Our present victories, however apparently complete, are never more than partial. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." All our earthly victories must go with watchfulness. He who would have us to triumph finally, says, "Hold fast that which thou hast; let no man take thy crown."

Verses 40—43. THE RAPID PROWESS OF THE OBEDIENT. The secret of Joshua's invincible prowess and rapid victories lay in the fact that he was doing the will of God, and that God was with him. So, if we fight the good fight of faith in full accord with the will of our heavenly Father, we may look for victory no less certainly, and, perhaps, no less rapidly. God Himself says, "I change not." We have the same Heart on our side that Joshua had—a heart loving us, and hating our

sins; we have, no less, the same Arm of power to contend for us. Why should we not go forth to victory with equal confidence? "Just so far as a Christian is led by the Spirit," said F. W. Robertson, "he is a conqueror. A Christian in full possession of his privileges is a man whose very step ought to have in it all the elasticity of triumph, and whose very look ought to have in it all the brightness of victory." It is because we so often go to our conflicts with doubting hearts and trembling steps, that our victories are so slowly won; it is because we so often go unled of God, that we have so repeatedly to mourn defeat. God is as potent in the spiritual realm as in the physical; it is only because we fail to get thoroughly into accord with His will and His aims that we fall short of Joshua's rapid and continuous victories. The more marvellous are our victories for God, the more readily shall we give glory to God (ver. 40). Those who do but little are tempted to call their triumphs their own; the man of many victories cannot but confess that in all cases the battle has been the Lord's.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *THE OVERTHROW OF THE CITIES OF THE NORTH, AND GENERAL RETROSPECT.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Hazor**] In ver. 11, Hazor is described as "the head" of all the kingdoms named in verses 1—3. It was in his capacity of principal monarch of North-West Canaan that Jabin summoned the other kings. Hazor was burned by Joshua (ver. 13), but was afterwards rebuilt (Judges iv. 2; 1 Sam. xii. 9); it was fortified by Solomon (1 Kings ix. 15), and its inhabitants, in the time of Pekah, were carried into captivity by Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kings xv. 29). **Jabin**]="*the wise*," "*the intelligent*." It is uncertain if Judges iv. 2 shews merely a coincidence of names, or whether the recurrence of the word points to the term as a title given to the kings of Hazor. **Madon**] Only mentioned here and in chap. xii. 19. The site is unknown. **Shimron**] In chap. xii. 20, called Shimron-Meron; it was probably situated near the Waters of Merom. It became part of the lot of Zebulon (chap. xix. 15). **Achshaph**] Not identified. It fell to the lot of Asher (chap. xix. 25). **2. On the north of the mountains**] *Heb.*="in the north on the mountains;" *i.e.*, on the mountains of Naphtali (cf. chap. xx. 7). **The plains south of Chinneroth**] Chinneroth may be used here for the Lake of Gennesareth itself (Numb. xxxiv. 11; Josh. xii. 3); the Arabah, or desert (not "plains") on the south, indicates the Ghor, or Jordan valley, immediately below the lake. **In the valley**] *Lit.* in "*the Shephelah*," or lowlands. "Probably the strip bordering the sea between Akko and Sidon, to which the following *Naphoth-Dor on the sea* directs us (chap. xii. 23)." [*Fay.*] The lowlands, south of Cape Carmel, situated on the sea coast, may, however, be intended. **3. Land of Mizpeh**] Gesenius traces several places bearing this and the similar name "Mizpah." Both words signify "a watch-tower," "a lofty place," "an outlook." "The land of Mizpeh (here intended) cannot be any other than the tract of country at the foot of the Jebel-esh-Sheikh between the Jebel Heisch and Nahr Hasbeya, through which a broad arm or line of hills of inconsiderable height runs southwards from the foot of the loftiest part of the Jebel-esh-Sheikh, forming the high land which shuts in Lake Huleh on the east. This tract is called Jebel Heisch according to Burckhardt (cf. Robinson iii. 344)." [*Keil.*] "Descriptive names are always liable to be duplicated; hence the Newtons and Moretons, the Sandfords and Uptons, the Fairfields and Stokes of our own country." [*Groser.*] **4. Horses and chariots very many**] The Israelites were not strangers to the use of war chariots. They had seen them in Egypt. They had been pursued by Pharaoh and his host with this rude kind of cavalry. These were not chariots with scythes. Keil has shewn that these were first introduced by Cyrus, being quite unknown at any earlier period. **5. Waters of Merom**] The only places in which the name Merom occurs in the Scriptures are verses 5, 7, of this chapter. It has been almost universally identified with the *Bahr-el-Hûleh* of the modern Arabs, which is called by Josephus, Semechonitis and Samochonitis; but the identification is supported by no documentary evidence, and has been disputed recently by two or three careful expositors. **6. Thou shalt hough their horses**] The LXX. translate by νευροκοπήσεις. To hough means to hamstring, to sever the tendons of the hind legs. It seems by no means certain that this was done on this occasion by Joshua. "The *Heb.* '*akar*' is used in 2 Sam. viii. 4, and in 1 Chron. xviii. 4, of chariots ('horses' is inserted in the English version), and in Zeph. ii. 4 it is used (in a paronomasia it is true) of the city of Ekron. In the passage in Gen. xlix. 6, if we read '*shur*' instead of '*akar*' (as is done by some, and as seems to be the most probable reading), the word '*akar*' is used of a wall. The word seems to be of the same stock with '*achar*' (compare the roots '*kanan*' and '*chanan*,' and many other examples), and the primary idea seems to be 'to strike' or 'to smite.' Proof is wanting that the ordinary translation of 'hough' is a correct one. It

would have been a difficult and useless task to hamstring an enemy's horse in battle, when a blow on the head or body would be easy and efficacious. And, moreover, there would have been a cruelty in it utterly at war with the kindly care enjoined upon the Jews in the law with respect to dumb animals (Deut. xxv. 4)." [*Crosby.*] 8. **Great Zidon**] Called "the great," both here and in chap. xix. 28, not to assert its superiority over any other city of the same name, but to indicate its large number of inhabitants, and that it was the chief city of Phœnicia. In the time of David and Solomon, Tyre had become the superior city of the two. **Misrephothmaim**] Various meanings have been given to the word. The place, though evidently near to Sidon, has not been satisfactorily identified. 13. **Stood still in their strength**] *Heb.*="*stood upon their hill;*" *marg.*="*on their heap.*" This does not mean that Joshua spared the cities which stood on hills, and destroyed cities which were not on hills. The historian simply points to the fact that the customary situation of the cities of the neighbourhood was upon some eminence. Freely paraphrased, the sense is: "Of the cities which stood each upon its hill, Israel burned," etc. (Cf. Jer. xxx. 18.) 17. **From the mount Halak**] *Marg.*="The smooth mountain;" or "the bare" or "bald" mountain: thought by Robinson and others to be a row of white cliffs, from sixty to eighty feet high, a few miles south of the Dead Sea, and supposed to be identical with the "ascent of Akrabbim." **Unto Baal-gad**] Schwarz supposes this to be identical with the modern *Banias* (Cæsarea Philippi). These two extreme points are given to mark the extent, southwards and northwards, of Joshua's conquest. 18. **A long time**] Comparing chap. xiv. 7, 10, and the date of sending the spies from Kadesh-Barnea (which Fay seems to forget was between one and two years after the exodus), the war of Joshua with the Canaanites must have lasted between six and seven years. Perhaps about a year was employed in the first general overrunning of the south, the remaining period of somewhat more than five years being spent in subduing the north, and in rendering the southern conquests more complete. Verse 21 obviously points to a return of the campaign to the southern part of the land, and is not to be read as merely a supplementary account of the same conflict recorded in chap. x. 36—41. 21. **Anab**] Mentioned also in chap xv. 50. "It has retained its ancient name, and lies among the hills about ten miles S.S.W. of Hebron, close to Shoco and Eshtemoa (Robinson i. 494)." [*Smith's Bib. Dict.*] 22. **Gaza**] This was one of the five chief cities of the Philistines. It was the frontier city on the way towards Egypt. It sustained for five months a siege by Alexander the Great, whose character, says Dean Stanley, suffers severely in the history of that event. (Cf. Grote's "Hist. Greece," xii. 193.) The coast line from Gaza to Cæsarea is remarkable in connection with the ministry of the apostles. **Gath**] Another of the five principal cities of Philistia. Mr. Porter concluded that it was situated on the hill now known as Tell-es-Safieh. Goliath, whose home was here, may have been a descendant of the Anakim. **Ashdod**] Now called *Ashdud;* the *Azotus* of Acts viii. 40. It was in the lot of Judah (chap. xv. 47), but seems never to have been entirely subdued. It preserved a language distinct from that of the Jews, till after the return from the captivity (Neh. xiii. 23, 24). The siege by Psammetichus, the longest on record, lasted twenty-seven years, and is thought to be alluded to in Jer. xxv. 20. It was destroyed by the Maccabees (1 Macc. v. 68; x. 84). 23. **And the land rested from war**] This marks the close of the first division of the book. In a general sense, it is said that Joshua had taken "the whole land;" in the details given in the second part of the book we learn that this is not to be understood absolutely; thus **Jehovah Himself says (chap. xiii. 1), "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed."**

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.*—Verses 1—14.

### The Victory at the Waters of Merom.

**I. The multiplied number of Joshua's enemies.** The great battle at Gibeon had been against five kings; this was against many kings. It was the largest force that the Israelites had yet encountered. Josephus (*Ant.* v. 1. 18), in what seems to be merely his own estimate, says: "The number of the whole army was three hundred thousand armed footmen, and ten thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand chariots; so that the multitude of the enemies affrighted both Joshua himself and the Israelites." While this statement must not be taken as proved, the Scripture reference to "all these kings," with an army "even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many," plainly shews that the force was the largest which had yet confronted the army of Joshua.

God leads His people on to increasingly difficult conflicts: 1. *For severer discipline;* 2. *For greater trust;* 3. *For higher victories.* The path of the just shines more and more, through conflicts which are sterner, through dependence which is humbler, and through victories which are nobler. The number of our foes,

when God fights for us, is but the visible pledge of the greatness of our victory. **II. The gracious encouragement given by Jehovah.** "Be not afraid," etc. (ver. 6). 1. *This encouragement seems to have been unsolicited.* Joshua seems to have been on the march to meet his foes when God spake to him. The distance from Gilgal, a little south of Mount Ebal, was too great for the march to Merom in less than one day, the time intimated by this verse. The spirit of obedience and the spirit of prayer are one, and God reads our plea for all necessary help in the very acts in which we seek to keep His commandments. 2. *The encouragement meets the new cause for fear.* For the first time in their experience, the Israelites had to encounter horsemen and war chariots. So the promise runs, "Thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire." The promise takes an old form (cf. chap. x. 8, etc.), but is adapted to the new emergency. God would have us give to His old encouragements such new meanings as our circumstances require. 3. *The encouragement is made emphatic by being made definite.* "To-morrow about this time," etc. God speaks to us as a mother might speak to her timid child; He accentuates the tones of His comforting assurances, according to the measure of our necessity and the depth of our fear. 4. *The encouragement points to help from God only.* "Will *I* deliver them." Keil says, "There is a peculiar emphasis intended in the *I* which precedes the participle." Similarly Masius wrote, "There is great force in the pronoun *I*. It is as if God had said, 'There is no cause for you to estimate the greatness of the present war by comparing it with your own strength. For that which I have so often manifested to you, I will now provide by My invincible power, and My nod, which shakes heaven and earth, shall perform these things.'" The Divine promises are generally so framed as to lead every devout man to say to his own soul, Hope thou in God. 5. *There was great encouragement in the very neighbourhood in which the battle was fought.* Here, it is thought, Abraham defeated Chedorlaomer and the three kings acting with him, and rescued Lot. Dr. Thompson says, in "The Land and the Book": "Often have I sat and gazed in dreamy delight upon the luxuriant plain of the Hûleh. No wonder the spies exclaimed, 'We have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good; a place where there is no want of anything that is in the earth' (Judges xviii. 9, 10). We have spread out before us one of the great battle-fields of the Bible—a vast theatre built by the Architect of the universe; and upon its splendid stage has many a bloody tragedy been played out in downright earnest." The first of these recorded battles by the waters of Merom was the victory of Abraham. Did Joshua know of and remember this as he proceeded to attack his foes? If so, the very site of the battle must have re-echoed back to him again and again during the conflict the gracious promise of this verse. **III. The complete fulfilment of the Divine assurance** (verses 7—9). The prospect of our conflicts shews the need of God. The hour of our necessity reveals the promise of God. The retrospect of our victories manifests the hand of God. "The Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel," as He said He would. It was, beyond all doubt, a God-given triumph. Every jot and tittle of the promise was fulfilled. The army was broken up into three great divisions, and the horses were "houghed," or rather, perhaps, smitten and slain. "Those that have God on their side, need not be disturbed at the number and power of their enemies; 'more are they that are with us than they that are against us.' They that have the Lord of hosts engaged for them have also the hosts of the Lord." [*Henry.*] **IV. The deep degradation and conspicuous ruin of those who are exalted highest in fighting against Jehovah** (verses 10—14). As the King of Ai (chap. viii. 29), and the five kings at Makkedah (chap. x. 26, 27), were singled out for a peculiar measure of punishment and shame, so also was Jabin the king of Hazor. With many of the Lord's people, the measure of their present humiliation will prove the measure of their future glory; for "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." With those who are enemies of God, the dignity of the present is but an index of the degradation of the future.

## OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

**Verses 1—6.** TAUGHT OF THE LORD. About seven centuries after this period in the national history, one of the prophets, portraying the blessings of the Church of the Messiah, made use of this expression: "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." Many of the more pious of the Old Testament saints had previously poured forth their praise of Jehovah in similar utterances. It was out of events like these in the conquest of Canaan that the more devout Israelites became so deeply impressed with the beauty of the Divine leading and teaching. Mark the gentleness and care of the Lord in the instruction given, up to this point, as outlined in the previous history of the war.

**I. God's care in teaching His people to rely on His unseen help.** At Jericho the hand of Jehovah had been conspicuously manifest; at Ai it was less visible. The conflict at Beth-horon was altogether greater, and more calculated to fill the Israelites with fear; God therefore gave *manifest help* in the miraculous hail-storm, and in the wonderful extension of the day. In the presence of the mighty host of the five kings, God stilled the fear of His people by revealing His own presence. In the minor conflicts of the south, God more concealed Himself. Still victory was sure. Jehovah was teaching His people to believe that His help was as potent when unseen as when plainly manifest. Then came this second great battle. Israel had to fight this also without manifest miraculous aid. Yet, not to withdraw Himself too fully, God graciously gave the assurance recorded in the sixth verse. Before Jericho, in the first battle, God had given comforting words, an assuring vision, and a miraculous overthrow of the walls. At the smaller battle of Ai there was merely a promise. At Beth-horon, the first really great battle in the land, the sun and moon and the hail, in addition to direct words of assurance, told the people of a present God. Then followed the minor battles in which they had to "walk by faith, and not by sight." In this second great battle the cheering words were given, but not the manifest works.

God would have us "endure as seeing Him who is invisible." God ever leads us from the sensuous to the spiritual. It has been so in the history of the Church. The ministry of Christ had many miracles. In the days of the apostles miracles were fewer. In subsequent times miracles were entirely withdrawn. True faith believes when little can be seen. True faith works when success seems small. **II. God's care in regulating the temptations by which His people are overtaken.** This huge battle with "all these kings" does not come at the beginning of the war. The Lord directly claimed to be dealing with the hearts of the Canaanites (verse 20); He did not suffer Jabin to be moved to this mighty effort till he "heard of those things" which had happened at Beth-horon. Not till Israel had proved the help of God did God suffer them to be confronted by the mighty host of Jabin. 1. *God tries His people gradually.* 2. *God never suffers His people to be tempted beyond that which they are able to bear.* 3. *God does but try His people that they may prove Him.* He prays well, who cries, "Lead us not into temptation." He believes well, who, when temptation comes, remembers that his Lord is counting upon him as able to endure. **III. God's care in directly nourishing His people's faith.** (Verse 6.) Faith is the gift of God. It is no less necessary that it should be maintained by God. Calvin aptly says, on this verse: "Unless new nourishment is every now and then given to faith, it forthwith melts and vanishes." 1. *God cultivates in us the rest of faith.* "Be not afraid." 2. *God points us to the one object of faith.* "I will deliver." 3. *God enables us to confirm our faith.* "To-morrow about this time." 4. *God expects from us the obedience of faith.* "Thou shalt hough their horses," etc. That part of the spoil was not to be retained. **IV. God's care in cultivating His people's**

**dependence.** The horses and chariots were to be destroyed for wise reasons. The Israelites had long before been forbidden to accumulate horses (Deut. xvii. 16). They were not to make war an art, as did the idolatrous nations around them. They were to deny themselves the facilities for, and thus keep themselves from the temptations to, that offensive warfare which would be likely to result from maintaining a force of cavalry. Above all, God would teach His people to say, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." 1. *The choicest spoil from our victories by God is an increased sense of dependence upon God.* 2. *Some of the incidental spoils in most of our spiritual triumphs have need to be sacrificed for our own spiritual safety.*

Verse 1. TAKE HEED HOW YE HEAR.

**I. Hearing and not hearing.** The tidings of the overthrow of Sihon and Og, and of the fall of Jericho, seem to have made almost no impression on the sleepy king of Hazor.

**II. Hearing, but hearing in vain.** When Ai fell, there seems to have been a general movement all through Canaan west of Jordan, to combine against Joshua (chap. ix. 1). Before Jabin had gathered the northern legions, southern Canaan had been destroyed.

**III. Hearing, and hearing to ruin.** When Jabin did exert himself, it was but to arise and proceed straight to destruction. Thus do the wicked delay heedlessly, awaken slowly, and finally bestir themselves to anticipate judgment.

Verses 4—8. THE MULTITUDE OF EVIL-DOERS.

**I. Unity is not always strength.** (Verse 4.) To bind them together in might that is invincible, numbers need truth.

**II. The visible does not always correspond to the actual.** The world ever loves to lean upon the host which is manifestly "as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude," and yet, all unwittingly, even upon its own ground of safety, the world ever miscalculates. (Cf. 2 Kings vi. 16, 17; 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8; Ps. lv. 18.)

**III. To walk "in the light of the eyes" is sometimes to lose the consolation that is of the ears.** (Verse 6.) The deaf and the dumb have marvellous intuitive perception. The blind are wonderfully quick in feeling. The loss of power in one physical sense compensated by an increased power in other senses. This emphatically the case in the spiritual world. Constant perception by sight the dulness of faith. Men who are ever depending on what they can see, hear few of the whispers of the Lord. Jabin and his host caught not a word of this heavenly consolation that fell so sweetly upon the open ears of Joshua.

**IV. To be strong in evil means presently to be tremendous in ruin.** (Verses 7, 8.) The height of evil-doers is but the distance of their fall. To be very strong, and yet surely destined to break, is only to break violently. The mighty hosts of Jabin only represented so much additional horror in the moments of his overthrow. Directly the great multitude fled, numbers did but accelerate and aggravate the end. The fear of a single man may be sore; the panic of the multitude, in which the fears of the host are multiplied into and focused upon the soul of the individual, is simply terrible. What will be the horror of that great day in which the infinitely larger host of all the wicked of all time flee away before the presence of the Lord, crying to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

## OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 15—23.

Verses 15—18. FIDELITY TO THE COMMANDS OF GOD.

I. True fidelity has regard, not to the commandment, but to God, from whom the commandment comes. Joshua "left nothing undone" which the Lord had bidden. Joshua's instructions came to him indirectly. He received the Lord's words through Moses. Joshua was concerned not so much with the stream, or its channel, as with the source from which it issued. He had submitted himself to another will, and like a true servant he set himself to obey. Nor was this implicit obedience either blind or unintelligent. To really trust God is to believe that He cannot do wrong; that He cannot fail in righteousness; that He cannot lack knowledge; that He cannot want love. 1. *Some men are faithful only in things which are pleasant.* Where God's commands and their own desires run in parallel lines, they go in the same direction as the commandments. Let not such deceive themselves; they are not in the way of the Lord. It is simply that their own way runs, for a little season, alongside the way of God. "He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all." 2. *Others only obey where they can understand.* Unless they can see what they think some adequate reason for obedience, they choose to regard obedience as unimportant. This is really to question the wisdom of God. 3. *True fidelity to God finds its controlling influences in God Himself.* To a noble-minded man like Joshua, this work of blood and judgment must have been one of pain. Like a true soldier, and a true servant, he had respect to his Commander rather than to the nature of the command. 4. *Such fidelity is a trust left to us by faithful predecessors.* These commands had been given to Moses. (Cf. Exod. xxxiv. 11—14; Numb. xxxiii. 50—56; Deut. xx. 16—18.) So far as he could, Moses had been obedient to the Divine word (Heb. iii. 5). Had Joshua been disobedient, he would have impaired the faithful work of his predecessor. Each of us is called to continue the faithful service of some who have gone before us. For us to fail is to mar the work on which they so conscientiously laboured.

II. Fidelity that is thorough is also fruitful. 1. *The good results of faithful service are foretold* (Exod. xxiii. 20—23). We also have exceeding great and precious promises. 2. *The good results of faithful service are attested by human experience.* Did ever any labour conscientiously for God, and find that he had served in vain? 3. *The good results of faithful service are not of man's efforts, but of God's grace.* This the Israelites themselves cheerfully acknowledged for many centuries after (Ps. xliv. 1—3).

III. The fruits of fidelity have to be gathered with patience. The war lasted for nearly seven years. (Cf. ver. 18, and Critical Notes.) 1. *Patience is essential to faithfulness.* Unless men had to wait, there would be no time for testing or shewing fidelity. 2. *Patience cultivates faithfulness.* To wait well is to discipline ourselves in fidelity. 3. *Patience is often necessary for the very prosperity which we seek.* God repeatedly told the Israelites that sudden success would be harmful to the very estate which they sought to inherit (Exod. xxiii. 29, 30; Deut. vii. 22). 4. *Patience does not reap less because it reaps slowly.* To wait for God never means to wait for nothing. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie."

> "Even the weariest river
> Winds somewhere safe to sea."

No man can conscientiously and perseveringly do the will of his Father in heaven, to find, ultimately, that he has laboured in vain. There is no field so fruitful as that which we plough at the bidding of God.

Verses 18, 19. I. The patience of the Lord's servants.

II. The persistence of the Lord's enemies.

"THE EXTIRPATION OF THE CANAANITES:

1. Due to their idolatry and immorality. 2. Executed through a Divine

sommand. 3. Set as a warning example for all times.

"They left nothing remaining which had breath. So when a whole people have sinned, the less guilty and the guilty fall together."—[*Fay.*]

Verse 20.—HARDENED HEARTS.

This cannot mean that God directly influenced the Canaanites to resist Himself and all repentance of their sin. The thought is too dreadful to be entertained even for a moment. It would be God's active participation in the Canaanites' guilt. Whether in the time of the Old Testament or in that of the New, "God cannot be tempted with evil, *neither tempteth He any man.*" On this authority of the Holy Spirit, then, Calvin is simply wrong when he says: "The Lord commanded Moses to destroy the nations whom He had doomed to destruction; and He accordingly opened a way for His own decree when He hardened the reprobate. . . . God hardens them for this very end, that they may shut themselves out from mercy." On the other hand, the words mean more than that God *permitted* the Canaanites to become hardened. God had been permitting the Canaanites to have their way ever since they settled in the land. He had warned them repeatedly; His Spirit had striven with them in those warnings; but God had done nothing to coerce them. To that extent, the Lord always permits everybody to have his own way. Even to the apostles, Jesus Christ says, "Will ye also go away?" They had liberty to depart, if they chose. God ever leaves so much of liberty to every man. Were it not so, saved men would no more be holy than a criminal is holy, who happens to be temporarily redeemed from the actual commission of guilt, and who walks, by a compulsion he cannot resist, the successive rounds of the treadmill. God had always "permitted" these Canaanites, in the sense of not coercing them. We must look for the Divine meaning, then, somewhere between these two positions. The essentially holy God could not influence these men to sin: yet God, who calls nothing holy which does not come from the choice of our hearts, had always *permitted* these men to sin. When it is said, "It was of the Lord to harden their hearts," if the words are not meaningless, some change is indicated in the Divine attitude towards these Canaanites. This change must lie somewhere between the two positions indicated. What is the change of attitude intended? Perhaps it may be defined, as nearly as we can define it, in some such thoughts as the following:—

**I. God's ordinary way with all men is to actively promote their sanctification.** Solemn and cheering providences. Messages of warning, or mercy. Examples and consequences of piety, and wickedness. Perhaps, also, the direct influences of His Spirit on the heart (cf. Gen. vi. 3).

**II. In the resistance which men offer to God, there is a certain point at which God forsakes those who are determined to transgress.** Were this not the case, no man could ever be lost hopelessly. If God were actively working for the lost in perdition itself, there must be hope even there. Nothing can be hopeless that is furthered by the hand of the Infinite. But perdition is without hope. It follows that, at some time or other before perdition, God must refrain from all His ordinary active interference for the salvation of those who are about to enter that state. That cessation of God's active interference is the time of God's forsaking.

**III. When God so forsakes men, they may be said to be given over by Him to hardness of heart.** He does not actively work the hardness. He no longer works to hinder it. True, this may be called "*permitting*" men to harden their own hearts; but the liberty to sin is so enlarged, it is so removed from all the direct gracious influences of heavenly constraint, that the "permission" must not be confused with that ordinary measure of liberty which God gives to all men. Henceforth, the result is so certain that language like that of the text is at least appropriate. If, in these New Testament times, no man can call Jesus Lord "but by the Holy Ghost," the issue in those Old Testament times must

have been so certain that it was proper to speak of God as having already given the transgressors over to judgment. In fact, when God leaves a man in *absolute freedom* to sin, to that man the beginnings of judgment have come already.

**IV. Past that point at which God gives men up as hopeless, all influences which tend to the shortening of life are merciful rather than otherwise.** Sin would be aggravated, indeed, by a prolonged life in such a state of heart. Surely no words ever breathed on earth were more profoundly full of pity than the words of Jesus to Judas, after all the "wooing of the betrayer" at the table had failed: "What thou doest, do quickly." Mercy had said, "It were good for that man that he had never been born." The birth and the life, however, were irremediable. The next best thing that Mercy could devise was that the end should come as soon as possible. Hence those words of terribly significant pity: "What thou doest, do quickly."

Verses 21, 22.—THE OVERTHROW OF THE ANAKIM.

The Anakim were a race of people of gigantic stature, descended from Arba (chap. xiv. 15; xv. 13). From passages like the former, it has been concluded that the word Anak was not the name of an individual, but of the race. Hebron seems to have been their principal city previous to their destruction by Joshua and Caleb. The chief tribes of this people appear to have been named after Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai.

**I. The Anakim as an old occasion of fear and unbelief.** The spies saw these giants, and reported, "We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (cf. Numb. xiii. 22—33). At the time referred to in this passage, the Israelites refused to trust God. 1. *They preferred to walk by sight rather than by faith.* From Deut. i. 22 it seems that the wish to send spies had originated with the people; and thus Numb. xiii. 1—3 must be read merely as shewing that God had acceded to this wish, taking the direction of the matter, however, into His own hands. God had declared the land good, and had promised it to the people for an inheritance. They wished to send and see for themselves. 2. *When the spies did see, they were less able to believe than before.* The cities were walled, and these sons of Anak looked so huge. Seeing made believing harder than ever. This is not an unusual result of trying to walk by sight, where God asks for our trust. He who depends on his intelligence for his faith must not wonder if he soon has cause to question both. 3. *The unbelief of the ten spies resulted in the unbelief of nearly all the host.* Only Moses, Joshua, and Caleb seem to have escaped the contagion. He who believes well generally leads others also to faith. Unbelief is even more fruitful than faith. No man can doubt to himself.

**II. The fear and unbelief of the past becoming victory and joy in the present.** The forty years in the wilderness had not been in vain. The Israelites had grown in grace. Where they had once sought to flee, they had now strength to fight. Where of old they had come to shame, they now found victory. Where they had formerly gathered a terrible heritage of pain, they now entered into joy and honour. There are fields of conflict behind most of us which yet wait to be redeemed from shame. The spiritual foes of our past, from whom we have fled in unbelief, should be confronted and conquered at the first opportunity.

**III. The fear and unbelief of the past turned into victory and joy only by the grace of God.** Divine mercy had led and taught these Israelites till at last they did not fear to attack even the Anakim. 1. *God's patience in training.* 2. *God's encouragements through mighty works.* 3. *God's perseverance unto the end.* It is He who "giveth the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." His love and power, as seen in the past, should make us strong in faith to meet the enemies of the future.

"Even that opposition which seemed invincible was got over. Never let the sons of Anak be a terror to the Israel of God, for even their day to fall will

some. Giants are dwarfs to Omnipotence.

"This struggle with the Anakim was reserved for the latter end of the war, when the Israelites were become more expert, and had more experience of the power and goodness of God. God sometimes reserves the sharpest trials of His people, by affliction and temptation, for the latter end of their days. Therefore 'let not him that girdeth on the harness boast as he that puts it off.'" [*Henry.*]

Verse 23.—THE PEOPLE FOR WHOM THE LORD FIGHTS.

**I. The magnitude of their difficulties should be regarded as only the measure of their victories.** "Joshua took the whole land."

**II. Their most signal earthly victories are ever incomplete.** The whole land, yet not the whole (cf. chap. xiii. 1).

**III. The triumphs which they do win are ever the fruit of God's promises.** "According to all that **the Lord** said unto Moses." This clause serves also to limit and explain the former. God had specially told Moses that the whole land should not be conquered too suddenly (Exod. xxiii. 29, 30).

**IV. The inheritance thus given by God should be the inheritance of all God's people.** "Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes."

**V. The rest which they obtain here faintly foreshadows the perfect rest hereafter.** "And the land rested from war." 1. *Rest after severe strife.* 2. *Rest only through faith and obedience.* 3. *Rest, but rest which still requires that they watch and pray.* 4. *Rest, which though but an imperfect pattern, should stand for a sure prophecy of the rest which is perfect.* If we really enter into the rest of faith, it will be by that Holy Spirit of promise, "which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession."

## CHAPTER XII.

### *SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CONQUESTS.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. The river Arnon**] Now known as *Wâdy el Modjeb.* **Before the war, it** separated between the Moabites and the Amorites of Eastern Palestine; it afterwards became the boundary between Moab and Israel. The river falls into the Dead Sea, and is described by Josephus as rising in the mountains of Arabia. **Mount Hermon**] Forming the southern extremity in the range of Anti-Lebanon, and thought to be about ten thousand feet high. It was famous for its appearance, and for its "dews" (Ps. cxxxiii. 3). It is thought by some to have been the scene of the Transfiguration. **2. Heshbon**] Situated about twenty miles east of the Jordan, and near the boundary between Reuben and Gad. The ruins are more than a mile in circumference. The "fishpools in Heshbon" are named in Cant. vii. 4. Sihon had taken this city from the Moabites (Numb. xxi. 26), into whose possession it afterwards again came. **Aroer**] This city stood on the northern bank of the Arnon (Deut. ii. 36; iv. 48). There were two other places of the same name; one assigned to Gad (chap. xiii. 25), and another in the south of Judah (1 Sam. xxx. 26—28). **Half Gilead**] The whole of Gilead reached from the Arnon to Bashan; the brook Jabbok, famous in the history of Jacob, dividing the territory about equally. **3. The way to Beth-jeshimoth**] *i.e.*, "towards Beth-jeshimoth," which was in the plains of Moab, near the place where the Jordan flowed into the Dead Sea, and to which point eastwards the Arabah extended. **From the south under Ashdoth-pisgah**] Or "towards the south under the slopes of Pisgah," thus marking the southern extremity of the Arabah. The word "Ashdoth" is probably not a proper name, and should not be taken, as by Dr. Clarke, to indicate a city. It is a deriv. of "*'eshed*"="*a pouring out.*" "A pouring out (of streams), a low place at the foot of mountains (Josh. x. 40; xii. 8)." With "*Pisgah*"="the roots (or springs) of Pisgah (Deut. iii. 17; iv. 49; Josh. xiii. 20)." [*Gesen.*] This word does not occur excepting in the Pentateuch and in the book of Joshua, whereas, on the theory of the "Jehovists" (cf. Art. on chap. x. 12—15), it would seem natural to find it occasionally, up to the time of Hezekiah, or even to the captivity, instead of its being so consistently confined to these earlier books of Scripture. Had it grown obsolete, "the Jehovist near to the Assyrian period" should have modernized it from his "Elohim documents." As it is, it looks somewhat like "a footprint on the sands" of its own time. **4. The coast of Og, king of Bashan**] "The expressed intention (ver. 1) was to give a list of the conquered kings, but here the kingdom is mentioned instead of Og the king." [*Masius.*] **Og also**

ruled over the northern part of Gilead (ver. 5), although his title refers to Bashan only. Dwelt at Ashtaroth and at Edrei] Not "the remnant of the Rephaim," but Og, who resided at times in either city. Perhaps Ashtaroth is the Ashteroth-Karnaim of Gen. xiv. 5, but this is very uncertain (cf. Smith's Bib. Dict.). In Deut. i. 4 we have "Ashtaroth *in* Edrei," yet these were evidently two cities (Josh. xiii. 12, 31; 1 Chron. vi. 71). Edrei is only named in Scripture in connection with the victory of Moses, but it is mentioned repeatedly in profane history. 5. Salcah] Now called *Sŭlkhad*, situated at the south of the Jebel Hauran. Burckhardt places it at about seven hours' journey from Bozra. The Geshurites and the Maachathites] Geshur was probably at the north or north-east of Bashan, adjoining Argob (Deut. iii. 14), afterwards called Trachonitis. Maachah seems to have been an adjoining province. The children of Ammon hired a detachment of Maachathites against David (2 Sam. x. 6). Absalom's mother was the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur (2 Sam. iii. 3). After the murder of Amnon, Absalom fled to Talmai for refuge (2 Sam. xiii. 37). 7. Baal gad . . . . Halak] Cf. on chap. xi. 17. 8. Mountains, etc.] Cf. on chapters ix. 1; x. 40. Geographical notes on most of the places named in the following verses will be found under the Critical Notes of the preceding chapters, principally under chapters x., xi. 13. King of Geder] Geder is thought to be the Gederah of chap. xv. 36, and was probably situated in the lowlands of Judah. 14. Hormah] = "*destruction*." The place was thus devoted on two occasions (Numb. xxi. 3; Judges i. 17). As the latter passage indicates, it was also called Zephath. The Israelites were defeated in this locality after the return of the spies (Numb. xiv. 45). The site is placed by Robinson near the pass *es-Sufah*, on the south of the Dead Sea. Arad] On the north of the wilderness of Judah (Judg. i. 16), *i.e.*, the southern part of this wilderness. It is thought to have been about twenty miles directly south of Hebron. 15. Adullam] A city of great antiquity (Gen. xxxviii. 1), situated in the Shephelah (Josh. xv. 33, 35), not far from Gath. It was fortified by Rehoboam, reoccupied on the return from the captivity (Neh. xi. 30), and is mentioned under the name of Odollam in 2 Macc. xii. 38. 17. Tappuah] Probably that mentioned in chap. xv. 33, 34, as in the Shephelah, or it may be the Tappuah on the frontier between Ephraim and Manasseh (chaps. xvi. 8; xvii. 8). There was also a Beth-Tappuah in the mountains of Judah (chap. xv. 53). Hepher] = "*a pit*." "In 1 Kings iv. 10 we find it mentioned as "all the land of Hepher," being named together with Shochoh as placed under one of the twelve officers whom Solomon set over all Israel. It should therefore be looked for near to Shochoh, *i.e.*, in the Shephelah, and not, as by Knobel, be identified with Haphraim (= "*two pits*") in the plain of Jezreel, belonging to Issachar (chap. xix. 19). It is also to be distinguished from Gath-Hepher, or Gittah-Hepher in the tribe of Zebulon (chap. xix. 13; 2 Kings xiv. 25). 18. Aphek] = "*strength*." It might be applied, says Dean Stanley, to any fort or fastness. "It is so common a name in Palestine, that its mention in 1 Sam. xxix. 1 is not of itself sufficient to identify it with the spot so called near Jerusalem, in 1 Sam. iv. 1, and the scene of the first Philistine victory must therefore remain uncertain, since there is nothing in the details of the battle to fix it" (*Sinai and Palestine*). The Aphek here named is thought to be the same as Aphekah, in the mountains of Judah (chap xv. 53), while Keil holds it to be identical with the Aphek of 1 Sam. iv. 1. 19. Lasharon] Cf. *Margin*. Mentioned only in this place, and not known. 21. Taanach . . . Megiddo] Two cities generally named together, situated on the boundary between Manasseh and Issachar, in the plain of Esdraelon by the river Kishon, into which the "waters of Megiddo" probably ran. The neighbourhood is famous as the scene of some of the most important battles in Hebrew history. 22. Kedesh] "A Levitical city of refuge on the mountains of Naphtali (chap. xix. 37; xx. 7; xxi. 32), according to the Onomast., twenty Roman miles from Tyre. There are two other cities mentioned of the same name—one in Judah (chap. xv. 23), and the other in Issachar (1 Chron. vi. 72)." [*Keil.*] Jokneam of Carmel] Belonging to Zebulon, and given to the Merarite Levites (chap. xxi. 34). Robinson thinks it may be placed at the modern *Tel Kaimûn*. 23. Nations of Gilgal] *Lit.* = "Goyim of Gilgal." The Goyim are thought to have been certain tribes, as those named in Gen. xiv. 1, called by this term as a proper name, and living in Gilgal, now Jiljilia, near Antipatris. 24. Tirzah] "Evidently near Shechem, and of proverbial beauty (Cant. vi. 4); selected by the first sovereign, Jeroboam (1 Kings xiv. 17), and then, during three short reigns, the habitual residence of the royal house (1 Kings xv. 21; xvi. 8, 17, 23). [*Stanley's Sinai and Palestine.*] Robinson identifies the city with *Tellûzah*.

## OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE PARAGRAPHS.

Verses 1—6. The Records of the Past.

The summary contained in this paragraph is—

I. The record of a good man's work, the worker having long gone to his rest. The victories on the east of Jordan had been won under Moses. At the time when this history was written, Moses had been dead at least several years. God remembers the labours of His servants after He has removed those who wrought them to another world. He who caused all

scripture to be written for our admonition would have us see that the pious man, "being dead yet speaketh," and speaketh not only to men, but in the memory of his Maker. God would have us also to remember the works of His departed servants. "Fresh mercies must not drown the remembrance of former mercies, nor must the glory of the present instruments of good to the Church be suffered to eclipse and diminish the just honour of those that have gone before them, and were the blessings and ornaments of their day. Joshua's services and achievements are confessedly great, but let not those under Moses be overlooked and forgotten." [*Henry.*] In the midst of his greatest honour, the true servant of the Lord will sometimes love to think of the foundation laid for his own work by the honourable service of others who preceded him.

**II. The record of mighty works wrought by Divine power and Divine patience.** The work of overthrowing Sihon and Og was, after all that may be said of the instruments, not the work of Moses, or Joshua, but the work of God. God prepared the Israelites for those great conflicts in several ways. 1. *By the encouragement of a preceding victory* (cf. Numb. xxi. 1—3). 2. *By severe discipline on the way* (Numb. xxi. 4—6). 3. *By great mercies on the way.* The brazen serpent. The gift of water, and the song at Beer. 4. *By direct promises of triumph over both Sihon and Og* (Deut. ii. 31—33, iii. 2, 3). Thus were the people prepared by Divine patience, and helped by Divine power when the time of battle came.

**III. A record made in brief chronicles which state results but omit the process.** Even the fuller accounts given in Numbers and Deuteronomy tell us but few of the details. What fears, what hopes, what disappointments, what pain of some and gladness of others are necessarily omitted from the record! All history is more or less like that. Men can never set down anything but the prominent, and much which they think obscure is probably more noteworthy to God than that which they deem sufficiently important to be written. Our powers are too limited for anything more than a brief epitome of what we call life's greatest events. But *what are* the "great events" of life? To our keener penetration and calmer estimate, everything is great—so great that, with our limited perception, all things seem great alike, when once we fairly confront them.

> "There is no great and no small
> To the soul that maketh all:
> And where it cometh all things are;
> And it cometh everywhere."
>
> *Emerson.*

And yet we go on epitomising and making abstracts of life, and needs must go on. With our straightened powers, it is the only way possible of getting the majesty of the past into the present. We have to transport it in fragments which are selected by the fancy of the moment, and then we name the fragments "history." We call chapters like this before us "summaries"; to God our fullest histories cannot be even worthy of that poor name, albeit it so humbly confesses its own weakness. To the mind of the Infinite, our amplest records can only be summaries of life with the sum of life's events left out. How glorious in its fulness and awful in its truth must be that "Book of Life" in the mind of the God of all the ages in which every thought and word and deed of men is accurately and completely written!

**IV. A record which has regard not only to the glory of victory but also the glory of faithfulness.** In the eyes of true Wisdom there are things greater than the taking of cities. The Israelites had found the territory on the east of Jordan a truly noble possession. The land was well suited to enrich a people hoping soon to settle down to quieter habits of life (Numb. xxxii. 1, 4). The rest of the people, in the hour of victory, might feel some desire to share this fertile tract of country. But even these brief chronicles put faithfully on record, at the very time for dividing the spoil, the promise which had been made to the two and a half tribes (ver. 6). These tribes had kept their word to

Moses (Numb. xxxii. 16—18); the rest of the people here indicate their readiness to fulfil the word of Moses to their brethren. No triumphs over others are so noble as our victories over ourselves. That nation is blessed indeed whose chronicles show its victories over itself, and its willingness to be subject to its own word.

**V. A record thus briefly chronicled in its results to be presently rendered into heart-stirring song.** The history here merely states the facts. The first five verses are almost entirely geographical notes of the territory taken; and the last verse hardly does more than tell us to whom the territory was to be given. The only expression which alludes to the conquest is the statement, in the first and sixth verses, that "the children of Israel smote and possessed the land." Centuries afterwards the facts were embodied in two of the national songs of praise, in language of warm-hearted thanksgiving and gladness (cf. Ps. cxxxv. 10—13, cxxxvi. 17—24). Are there not many events in our personal and national experience which, lying now in the past, with hardly a note to record them or a memory to recall them, shall presently be celebrated in joyful song before the throne of God itself? Meanwhile, let each of us learn to sing, even here, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not *all* His benefits."

Verses 7—24. THE COUNTED AND UNCOUNTED DEAD.

In the brief chronicles of these few verses, dull and unimaginative as they look, there may be traced two or three features not without their pathos, and not devoid of significance to us who are the tenants of life and time now.

**I. Some of the dead are counted, and some are not counted.** Here is one man put down as slain, to represent a kingdom of dead. That is done in each of the thirty-one instances. The slain of the army and the slain of the home, the slain who were aged and the slain who were young, slain men and slain women: all these are merely counted in their slain king. Modern registration may be more thorough, but in the minds and thoughts of surviving men and women now, the count of the dead proceeds on much the same basis. 1. *Men count the few, and not the many.* Only here and there a name of the past survives in the present. The living are too weak, in more ways than one, to bear in mind more than a few of the dead. We, too, count our dead representatively. 2. *Men count the great, and pass over the obscure.* In the realms of statesmanship, eloquence, literature, art, science, and the like, men can do little more than put down the names of their kings. 3. *Men count the deaths which are unusually sad, and keep little reckoning of such as are more ordinary.* Irrespective of those who may be left, it seems more than a common calamity for a king to be slain, or die. To pass out of all the magnificence and power of an imposing past into a stillness and silence and helplessness which differ nothing from that of a dead peasant, seems peculiarly sad for the dying man himself. So, for a little season, over whatever realm the departed king may have reigned, his survivors will remember him. They put his death down in their chronicles. 4. *Men count the rich and forget the poor.* Great wealth? then much marble, or granite; little wealth? only a small monument; just enough during life for life's necessities? the barest measure of plainest stone must suffice in death; very poor? then no stone whatever, and, it may be, not even a grave to oneself. Such is the testimony given by the graveyards and the cemeteries; and, taking society in its broader aspect, the witness without is a pretty faithful symbol and record of the mind within. What county, or town, or parish, remembers a dozen of its poor of the last generation? Without murmuring against the inevitable, it may be well sometimes to mark the fact. 5. *God counts, and will count, every one.* He forgets no single person in all the host of the dead. From the youngest infant to Methuselah, from the poorest person to the richest, He remembers all. "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God."

**II. These dead Canaanites, counted and uncounted, were all overtaken**

**by a common judgment.** Kings, and leaders, and people, fell in a general slaughter. Heedless of condition or character, every one appeared to be dealt with alike. **1.** *In this life the guilty and innocent often seem to be judged in the same measure.* (*a*) Some men are conspicuously guilty. They are leaders in wickedness. They use high positions and great influence to lead others astray. (*b*) Others are comparatively innocent. Like many of these Canaanites, who, it may be, held aloof from the wickedness around them, they take little active part in the open wickedness of their fellows. (*c*) The innocent and guilty seem to be dealt with alike. Children and adults, worshippers of idols and those who refused to worship, fell in the same way before the swords of the Israelites. Men look on life as, in its degree, it everywhere repeats this history; and they say, "The ways of the Lord are not equal." **2.** *The judgments of life are far more equal than they seem.* (*a*) The particular way in which we may be taken out of this life is a very small item in the account of eternity. We must all die. Who can say what time is the best? Who can say what manner is the best? God has the right to choose both the time and manner of our departure. It is best so. We are thankful it is so. What a mass of embodied pain and crime and wrinkled wickedness would still crawl the earth, if men chose the day of their own death! Ahab and Jezebel and Judas and Nero would be with us still. What perplexity would fill men if they had to decide on the manner of their departure! Men would stand before the various diseases, and other ways of exit, saying, "What I shall choose I wot not." To have made us all choose our own way of dying would have been for God to have doubled the ordeal: most men would have suffered at least one death in anticipation, ere they came to the fact. It is probably only our shortsightedness, and our recoil from the horror that is visible, which leads us to throw so much emphasis as we mentally do on the slaughter of these more innocent Canaanites by the sword. Anyway, the manner and time of death are small items in the matter of eternity. (*b*) God's real judgment of every man is within the man. Much of punishment is the recoil of our own guilt. The true Nemesis is not some one with a pair of scales and a whip, standing without us, but something standing within us, making us to do our own weighing and our own scourging.

> "Fear not, then, thou child infirm:
> There's no god dare wrong a worm.
> Laurel crowns cleave to deserts,
> And power to him who power exerts;
> Hast not thy share? on wingèd feet,
> Lo! it rushes thee to meet;
> And all that Nature made thy own,
> Floating in air, or pent in stone,
> Will rive the hills and swim the sea,
> And, like thy shadow, follow thee."
>
> *Emerson.*

(*c*) This judgment of God within a man is continued after this life, and is always true and equal to the man's deserts. Thus, the Saviour, for once during His ministry, draws aside the veil that shuts out perdition, and shews us Abraham standing afar off, and saying in language of terrible significance to Dives: "Son, *remember*." Whatever may be the outward state of the wicked on the other side of this life, surely this "remembering" will be *the judgment*.

**III. These dead are all overwritten by a common epitaph.** The counted kings, and the uncounted people, were those "which Joshua and the children of Israel *smote*." They were not merely killed in a war; they were "smitten" because of idolatry. God had said: "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full," and, till it became full, God waited. Then the Israelites were bidden to smite. Thus the common epitaph of all these Canaanites is really this: "Slain because of idolatry." **1.** *The state of unrepented sin generally leads to some conspicuous sin, great in the insult which it offers God and in the injury which it does to men.* **2.** *The conspicuous sins of men, which stand immediately connected with judgment, are but the outcome of a life of sin.* **3.** *The conspicuous sin of this dispensation, with which the judgment of men is specially connected, is the rejection of the Saviour.*

The great epitaph which stands written over all those who enter into "the second death" is a very brief one. Of His children God writes, "These all died in faith"; of the rest of mankind it may be said, "These all died in unbelief."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *JOSHUA COMMANDED TO DIVIDE THE LAND: THE CITIES AND BOUNDARIES OF THE TWO AND A HALF TRIBES.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Old and stricken in years**] *Heb.* = "*old and come into days*," or "*years*." A common form of expression for advanced age (Gen. xviii. 11; xxiv. 1). Repeated of Joshua (chap. xxiii. 1, 2). There are no sufficient *data* for ascertaining Joshua's exact age at this time. Josephus (*Ant.* v. 1. 29) says that Joshua lived twenty-five years after the death of Moses. This would make Joshua eighty-five years of age at the time of Moses' death, and about ninety-two at the date marked by this verse, according well with his death, about eighteen years later, at the age of one hundred and ten years (chap. xxiv. 29). If these figures are correct, Joshua was six or seven years older than Caleb (chap. xiv. 5). **2. The borders of the Philistines**] *Lit.* = "*the circles*," "*the circumference*." The Philistines were not Canaanites, but were descended from Mizraim, through Casluhim (Gen. x. 6, 14; 1 Chron. i. 8, 11, 12). They must therefore be regarded as belonging to the second rather than the fourth branch of the great Hamitic race. In Gen. xxi. 32, 34; xxvi. 1, 8, the Philistines are named as already inhabiting the neighbourhood of Gerar, in the extreme south-west of Palestine. In Deut. ii. 23. we find them as "the Caphtorim which came forth out of Caphtor," destroying "the Avim." and making an encroachment northwards to Azzah (afterwards Gaza), and establishing themselves in what was subsequently known as "the land of the Philistines," or "the plain of the Philistines." They are more than once mentioned as Caphtorim by the prophets (Jer. xlvii. 4; Amos ix. 7). They are sometimes called "Cherethites" (1 Sam. xxx. 14; Ezek. xxv. 15, 16; Zeph. ii. 4—6), who are repeatedly named with "the Pelethites" (2 Sam. viii. 18; 1 Kings i. 38, 44). In view of this interchange of such names as point to the origin of the Philistines, perhaps it is safest to accept the hint given elsewhere by the prophets (Jer. xxv. 20, 24; Ezek. xxx. 5), and regard them, in common with some other races included in the phrase, as a "mingled people." This, too, is in part sustained by the probable meaning of the word "Philistines" "*Philistæa* = prop. 'the land of wanderers,' 'strangers;' LXX. = Ἀλλόφυλοι. γῆ Ἀλλοφύλων." [*Gesen.*] The language of the Philistines is held to have been Shemitic rather than Hamitic. Perhaps this merely points to a very early contact of these nomadic Casluhim and Caphtorim with some of the Shemitic families; *e.g.*, Abimelech and his people with Abraham and Isaac, as above. **Geshuri**] Not the same as "the border of the Geshurites," in chap. xii. 5, but a district south of Philistia, on the way towards Arabia. **3. Sihor**] Or *Shichor* = "the Black River." Thought by some to mean here the Pelusiac branch of the Nile. This has been controverted by Raumer and others. Keil says: "*The Sihor, which is before* (on the east of) *Egypt*, can be no other than the *Nachal Mizraim* (brook of Egypt), which is described as being the southern boundary of Canaan towards Egypt, not only in chap. xv. 4, 47, and Numb. xxxiv. 5, but also in Isa. xxvii. 12, 1 Kings viii. 65, and 2 Chron. vii. 8. It is the brook which flows into the Red Sea near to Rhinocorura (el Arish). In 1 Chron. xiii. 5, this is actually called Shihor of Egypt." The last passage shews that, in the time of David, the land had been taken as far south as this extreme boundary. **To the borders of Ekron northward**] Indicating the entire extent of the Philistine territory: although the Philistines were not a part of "the devoted people," yet their land was "counted to the Canaanites," *i.e.*, it formed a part of Canaan proper. Ekron, now *Akir;* in Macc. x. 89 it is called Accaron. The city was celebrated for the worship of Baal-zebub, the fly-god (cf. 2 Kings i. 2). **Gaza . . . Ashdoth . . . Gath**] Cf. on chap. xi. 22. Gath was the city of the Giants. **The Eshkalonites**] Eshkalon, or Askelon, stood upon the sea coast, south of Ashdod It was taken by Judah (Judges i. 18), but is not named with the other Philistine cities, in chap. xv. 45—47, as in the allotment of this tribe. **The Avites**] The former occupants of the land (Deut. ii. 23), some of whom may have been spared, and suffered to retain a part of the land. **4. From the south**] The Masoretic division of this verse is confusing, and is generally held to be incorrect. Groser's remark seems to furnish the correct meaning: "The words 'from the south' have caused some difficulty, which disappears by reading them (as in the LXX. version) as a proper name,—'from Teman.' the former southern limits of the Avites' territory. '*All the land of the Canaanites*' seems to sum up what has gone before, and should be followed by a full stop. From 'Mearah' on the north-west, between Tyre and Sidon, to one of the Apheks on the east, bordering the old Amorite territory of Bashan." [*Joshua and his Successors.*] **5. The Giblites**] Probably the inhabitants of Gebal. The LXX. have "*Biblians;*" the Vulg. "*Giblians.*" Gebal was apparently on the coast of Phœnicia, near to Sidon (cf. **Ezek. xxvii. 9; Ps. lxxxiii. 7;**

see also *Marg.* 1 Kings v. 18). **Lebanon toward the sunrising**] = The eastern range, *i.e.*, Anti-Lebanon. **The entering into Hamath**] The valley of the Orontes, between the two ranges of Lebanon, and leading into Upper Syria, towards its chief city Hamath. 9. **Medeba unto Dibon**] The southern part of a table-land reaching from Rabbath Ammon to the river Arnon. Both places were given to the Reubenites (verses 16, 17), but were afterwards retaken by Moab (Isa. xv. 2). Dibon, now *Diban*, was rebuilt by the Gadites after it was taken by Moses (Numb. xxxii. 34), and thus for a short time seems to have borne the name of Dibon-Gad (Numb. xxxiii. 45, 46). The famous "Moabite Stone," containing an inscription of great antiquity, was found here a few years since. 17. **Bamoth-baal**] Cf. *Margin*, and Numb. xxi. 20; xxii. 41; Isa. xv. 2 **Baal-Meon**] "One of the towns which were built by the Reubenites (Numb. xxxii. 38), and to which they 'gave other names.' It occurs in 1 Chron. v. 8, and on each occasion with Nebo. In the time of Ezekiel it was Moabite, one of the cities which were the 'glory of the country' (Ezek. xxv. 9). In the days of Eusebius and Jerome it was still called Balmano, nine miles distant from Heshbon, and reputed to be the native place of Elisha." [*Smith's Bib. Dict.*] 18. **Jahaza**] Probably on the east of Dibon, bordering on the desert (cf. Numb. xxi. 23, etc.). Here Sihon was defeated and slain. The city was given to the Levites, as were the two other cities named in this verse (chap. xxi. 36, 37), both of which seem to have been not far distant (Deut. ii. 26; 1 Chron. vi. 78, 79; Jer. xlviii. 21). 19. **Kirjathaim**] The Emim were defeated here by Chedorlaomer (Gen. xiv. 5). With Sibmah, and Zareth-Shahar, it seems to have stood in the rise of the valley from Heshbon towards Mt. Nebo. Sibmah was famous for its vines (Isa. xvi. 8, 9; Jer. xlviii. 32). 20. **Beth-Peor**] Near to or upon Mt. Peor (Numb. xxiii. 28; Deut. iii. 29). **Ashdoth-Pisgah**, *etc.*] Cf. on chap. xii. 3. 21. **Dukes of Sihon**] = "*Vassals of Sihon;*" so Keil and others. While "princes," or petty "kings" (cf. Numb. xxxi. 8) of the Midianites, they were probably tributaries to Sihon, in whose country they were dwelling. 22. **Balaam also**, *etc.*] There is no good reason for considering this and the preceding verse to be "irrelevant" and "borrowed from the history in Numbers," as suggested by Dr. A. Clarke. Balaam's counsel had been the cause of the battle in which he and the five princes who dwelt in this territory were slain. When dealing with the geography of this country, it was not irrelevant but natural for the historian to tell us of these people who were in the unusual position of pastoral settlers among its regular inhabitants, and to allude thus briefly to the cause of their destruction. 23. **Jordan and the border thereof**] The natural boundary which the Jordan formed. The Jordan is similarly mentioned in verse 27. 25. **Jazer**] "It was taken from the Amorites, and fortified by the Gadites (Numb. xxi. 32; xxxii. 35). It was assigned to the Levites (Josh. xxi. 39; 1 Chron. vi. 81) and afterwards taken by the Moabites. After the exile it belonged to the Ammonites (Isa. xvi. 8; Jer. xlviii. 32; 1 Macc. v. 8). Its situation, according to Eusebius, was ten Roman miles westward from Philadelphia (Rabbath-Amman), and fifteen miles from Heshbon." [*Keil.*] **Aroer that is before Rabbah**] Thus distinguished from Aroer of Reuben, on the banks of the Arnon. **Rabbah**] Called sometimes, in distinction from other cities of the same name, "Rabbath of the Ammonites." It was the chief city of Ammon, and though not originally assigned to Israel, it was subsequently besieged by Joab, and taken by David (2 Sam. xi. 1; xii. 26—31). About B.C. 250, Ptolemy Philadelphus gave it the name Philadelphia. 26. **Unto Ramath-mizpeh and Betonim**] These two cities seem to represent the extent of the territory of the Gadites towards the north, from the direction of Heshbon, which stood in the lot of Reuben. This is the only place where the former of the two cities is mentioned under this name, though it is thought by some to be the same with Ramoth-Gilead. **Mahanaim**] = "*Two hosts*" (cf. Gen. xxxii. 2, 7, 10). It seems to have been strictly a frontier town, as it is named as being also on the border of Manasseh (ver. 30). It belonged to the lot of Gad, but was given to the Levites (chap. xxi. 38). Here Abner proclaimed Ishbosheth (2 Sam. ii. 8, 9), and to the same place David fled from Absalom (2 Sam. xvii. 24), it being then a walled town large enough to contain the king and the thousands who followed him (2 Sam. xviii. 1, 4). **Debir**] There is some uncertainty concerning the name, and the site is unknown. 27. **In the valley, Beth-aram, and Beth-nimrah**] The valley of the Jordan, in which these and the two following towns were situated. The order of the names is from the south of the valley upwards, Beth-aram being near Peor and Zaphon (Tsaphon = "the north") the most northerly town of the four, and probably of the tribe, standing near to the sea of Chinnereth. 30. **All the towns of Jair**] *Heb.* = "*Chavvoth-Jair;*" the same as the Havoth-Jair of Numb. xxxii. 41. *Chavvoth*, pl. of *chavvah* = "life," is the same with *chayyah*, which (according to Gesenius) = "A family, a tribe, especially of Nomades, hence *a village of Nomades, a village* [prop., place where one *lives, dwells*, so Germ. *leben* in proper names *Eisleben, Aschersleben*] (Deut. iii. 14; Josh. xiii. 30; Judges x. 4; 1 Kings iv. 13)." Hence, the Havoth-Jair were "the dwelling-places of Jair." The passage in Judges speaks of them as thirty cities, but the number is usually given as sixty (cf. also 1 Chron. ii. 22, 23). 31. **The children of Machir**] Machir was the eldest son of Manasseh. His descendants appear to have been by far the larger portion of the tribe (cf. Numb. xxvi. 29; chap. xvii.). It seems impossible to decide how the families of Machir, Jair, and Nobah, **the sons of Manasseh, were distributed in the two lots, one on each side of Jordan, which fell to this tribe.**

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—7.

### God's Outlook upon Man's Life, and Work, and Hopes.

The Lord, who had called His people to this war (chap. i.), is here seen bidding them to rest from war. For nearly seven years they had been toiling and striving on the battle-fields of Canaan. Without this special commandment to rest, Joshua would probably have felt it to be his duty to go on with the conflict till every city was won, and there remained no more of the land to be possessed. The Divine command, while it may have wrought some anxiety of mind, must have been very welcome to Joshua personally. The aged warrior needed rest, and must have longed with deep desire to see the hosts of his people settled, each in their portion. This is given as a principal reason for the command to cease from war and proceed to the division of the land. **I. The outlook of God on a human life.** "Thou art old and stricken in years . . . . now therefore divide this land." 1. *God has regard to the failure of our lives.* We do not grow feeble unobserved. The gathering infirmities of the aged are watched, not merely by loving hearts on earth, they are seen also from heaven. God marks our failing strength. "He knoweth our frame." "Few people know how to be old," said La Rochefoucauld; and Madame de Stael, "It is difficult to grow old gracefully." Vast numbers prove the sayings only too true. Joshua had been a noble exception. Ever since he went with Caleb and the other ten spies to search out the land, he had been putting on with each increasing year something more of the fear of God; and now, as an old man of well nigh a hundred years, he was full of wise kindness and gentleness towards his fellows, and of love to Him who had given him strength in so many marches, and victory in so many battles. And Jehovah had respect unto His servant. (*a*) God sees the failure of men who are conscious that they are failing. (*b*) God marks the failure of men who are careless of their infirmities, or who seek to hide them. Young has told us that old age should

> "Walk thoughtful on the silent, solemn shore
> Of that vast Ocean it must sail so soon;"

but whether men heed their nearness to eternity or hide it, God daily watches their failing powers. Many years later He looked down upon the children of some of these very people whom Joshua led into the land, and said of Ephraim, "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." 2. *God thinks with sympathy on the hopes and disappointments of our lives.* Joshua could not but have hoped to see the people settled in their lots. When Moses had to go up Mount Nebo and die, without leading the people into Canaan, it was regarded as a punishment. It was in mitigation of that punishment that he was permitted to see the land. So, doubtless, Joshua would have been disappointed had he been called away ere the people had received their inheritance. God had sympathy with the hopes of His servant. No less does our heavenly Father sympathise with our hopes, when they have regard to His glory and to His people's joy. 3. *God remembers the promises by which our hopes have been inspired and animated.* Joshua had repeatedly received the promise that he should cause the people to inherit. It had been given through Moses (Deut. i. 38; iii. 28; xxxi. 7, 23). It had been given by God to Joshua directly (chap. i. 2—15). When God Himself has inspired our hopes and kept them alive, He will not suffer them to fail because of our weakness. **II. God's contemplation of our life's work.** "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed." *Very much* of what Joshua had been wont to consider as his assigned labour would have to be left undone. Consider the following features in the Lord's thought of us as engaged in His work: 1. *He is self-contained and patient in view of our slowness.* There is no word of reproach to Joshua. God takes time for His own work. The length of the geological periods. The quiet and steady succession of the seasons. The silent and gradual growth

of animal and vegetable life. God can allow His servants time for their work. He who hastens not Himself, is not dependent on the haste of men. No purpose of His will fail because human hands are but weak. God is willing to allow His servants all time that is necessary. He measures our work, not by what we have done, but by how we have done. 2. *He is very compassionate towards us in our weakness and weariness.* Looking back on our past, He sees where we have left our strength. Beneath His considerate eye, every act which we have done from a right heart becomes the visible embodiment of so much of our departed power. In the Jerichoes and Beth-horons and Meroms which lie in the rear of His children's march, He is pleased to behold monuments reared to His own name, each one being built out of so much of their freely offered might. Their work, at places, may be rough and poor, and may stand for little of good to men or of glory to Himself; there may be Ais in it, as well as Jerichoes; it is enough for Him that His people have been trying to serve Him, and that the process has exhausted them. When He comes to the place where He has to say, "Thou art old and stricken in years," that is also the place where He loves to think of their long-cherished hopes, and to add, "Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance." God sees where *our* strength has been poured out. He pities *us* in *our* weakness, and if we have been spending our might in His service, His compassion will not come to us empty-handed. He still loves to connect His pity with our rest, and with some inheritance. Jesus also says to His weary disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile;" and the desert, like the sea immediately after, witnesses to new wonders both of His love and power (cf. Mark vi. 31—51). 3. *His compassion does not leave us to idleness, but merely leads Him to change our work.* Joshua might cease from war, but he must proceed to divide the land. So with the disciples just referred to: the rest of the desert was but a change of work, and the rest of the sea came only in the peace which followed the storm. The "rest of faith" should not be inactivity. The rest of heaven will not be inactivity. Here or hereafter, the Lord does not make a heaven for us out of idleness within us. **III. The stateliness of God's words and purposes.** Bring together yet again the words of the opening and closing verses of the paragraph: "There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed. . . . Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance." The land which was not taken was apportioned with the same calmness as the land already conquered. (Compare chap. xiii. 2—4*a*, with xv. 45—47; also xiii. 4*b*—6, with xix. 24—48.) Had Israel been faithful, all would have been equally inherited.

Here, then, as we survey this calm assignment of the land of unconquered nations, we feel constrained to adoringly acknowledge that we are in a Presence far above our own. Like admiring David, when Divine mercy had spoken of his house "for a great while to come," we can only say, This is not "the manner of man, O Lord God" (cf. also Isa. lv. 8, 9). These are ways and thoughts which, in their combination of calmness and majesty, are "stamped with their own divinity." 1. *This lofty manner gives us a glimpse of the sublime repose of God in His own consciousness of infinitude.* (*a*) Touching His enemies, He rests in His felt might. No word is spoken to assert the sufficiency of the might. Nothing so much as looks in that direction. There are no disturbing thoughts whatever. The power is so great, that the question of sufficiency does not even occur. (*b*) Touching His people, God rests in His love (cf. Zeph. iii. 17). For the present, God said to assure Joshua, "Them will I drive out." These are words, however, the Israelites well knew must depend on their faithfulness, and must be remembered together with some other words to which they had often listened, and which were yet to be repeated (cf. Exod. xxiii. 20—24; Numb. xxxiii. 52—56; chap. xxiii. 11—13). 2. *This lofty manner also belongs to the ministry of Jesus Christ.* (*a*) *It is manifest in all His miracles.* He says, "Fill the water-pots with water;" "Give ye them to eat;" "Take ye away the stone." The beginning of every miracle gives a pledge of the end, and the pledge is given in a manner peculiar to Christ Himself.

Moses at the sea, or before the rock at Horeb, makes you feel his excitement. Elijah, standing on Carmel, or stretched on the body of the dead child at Sarepta, trembles in the consciousness of a mere humanity which is about to become the vehicle of a power so utterly beyond his own. Paul with dead Eutychus, and Peter with dead Dorcas, are ever so unlike Christ with the dead son of the widow, the dead daughter of the ruler, or dead Lazarus of Bethany. There is always this "manner of men" even when men in an unquestioning faith know they are to be aided to work the works of God; their manner is not the manner of Jesus Christ. (*b*) *This feature is still more marvellously manifest in many of the Saviour's promises and invitations.* Examples: "If I be lifted up," etc.; "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me," etc.; "Heaven and earth shall pass away," etc. (*c*) *There is the same assuredness of outlook in the Saviour's words of doom over the wicked.* His prophetic denunciations over particular cities sometimes embrace a considerable amount of detail; and however full the detail, nothing is left contingent or ambiguous. His utterances have in them nothing of the ancient oracles; they provide but one meaning, and never so much as glance at the possibility of that meaning remaining unfulfilled. This is so in His dealing with Chorazin and Bethsaida, and the same calm realism pervades the words which announce the fall of Capernaum. He seems to speak from within His own unerring consciousness, looking with quiet sadness at the clear map of the inevitable future lying unfolded there, rather than in indignation against the offending cities themselves. Thus above Jerusalem, which would not be gathered to Him, He beholds the hovering eagles of Rome, around it He sees the trench of Titus, while within it He marks the would-be fugitives who are hastening from point to point, only to learn in an increasing terror that they ought to have escaped to the mountains yesterday. All this, and more, is seen in a calmness disturbed only by His tears, and proclaimed as unavoidable just because the people will have the sin which not even He can separate from the doom. In the same august knowledge and power He still waits upon His throne. He must reign. There may be much more land which, as yet, His people have not possessed. He treats it already as His own. Meanwhile, in a great and calm anticipation which has not even a thought that it can be otherwise, He sitteth in the heavens, "from henceforth *expecting* till His enemies be made His footstool.

LESSONS.—1. *Touching our inheritance, how peaceful should be the rest of our faith!* 2. *How realistic and bright should be our hope!* 3. *How inevitable, to themselves, should seem the destruction of all the enemies of Christ!*

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 1. OLD AGE IN ITS RELATION TO WORK.

"The words, 'old and stricken in years,' do not contain a tautology, but accurately express the period of life according to a division which was long familiar to the Jews, and may not have been unknown to them even at this early period. According to this division, old age consisted of three stages, the first extending from the sixtieth to the seventieth year, constituting the commencement of old age properly so called; the second extending from the seventieth to the eightieth year, and constituting what was called hoary, or hoary-headed age; and the third extending from the eightieth year to the end of life, and constituting what was called advanced age, and caused the person who had reached it to be described as one stricken in years. At this closing stage Joshua had now arrived." [*Ed. of Calvin, in loc.*]

In this verse several important practical considerations are suggested. Read in connection with the history, we have brought under our notice—

**I. A good man helped very much by God, but subject no less than others to the laws of nature.** Joshua grew old. It was proper to say of him also

that he was "stricken in years." God's love does not exempt any man from God's laws. The holiest of men, in common with the wickedest, have ever been subject to "the wear and tear of life." A poet said admiringly of the ocean,

> 'Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow;"

but however much Time may spare the face of the ocean, it spares no man. Abraham was "the friend of God;" but of him also it is written, he "was old and well stricken in age." David is spoken of as the man after God's own heart; he had to write of himself, nevertheless, "I have been young, and now am old." John was wont to speak of himself as "that disciple whom Jesus loved;" he, too, drifted presently into that consciousness of many years, which made it seem to him quite appropriate to address men around him as "little children." Paul knew much, and wrote much, of the love and fellowship of Christ; it did not keep him from coming to that sense of years out of which he wrote of himself to Philemon, "being such an one as Paul the aged." God's love to us will give us no immunity from God's laws. Why should it? His laws are not to be set over against Himself, as though He were on one side, and they were on another. His laws are the outcome of His love, and not something working contrary to His love. Not a few have learned that this law of physical decay is also a law of love. Many besides Job have looked gratefully at even the issues of decay, and have said in their turn also, "I would not live alway." Yet in the stately march of time there seems something of unfeelingness. We measure the flight of time by our clocks, and how ruthlessly each individual clock seems to tick! A clock seems the embodiment of a living thing with absolutely no heart. Are we in joy? no pulse of the clock beats any faster. Are we in sorrow? the length of the tick is exactly the same. The thing has no sympathy—no bowels, as these ancient Hebrews would have said. Are we ill? nothing seems so unaffected by it as the clock. Are we strong in health, buoyant in spirits, cheered by some great victory, or made very glad by some of God's good mercies? the clock seems absolutely indifferent. Are many lives depending for their rescue on two or three more minutes ere a tide flows or a train is due? the clock will not vary a single second for them all; it will not even go faster; it has no delight in the deaths, and no concern in the lives; it is so aggravatingly itself. An heir is born to a throne; a city is moved with joy, and a whole kingdom is excited with gladness; even the iron cannon that greet the new life seem to put on an unusual loudness; but the clock puts on simply nothing, and puts off nothing. It is the same when people die. However great they may have been, however good, it makes no difference; through the long hours of the night in which loving watchers wait around the bed of the sufferer; amidst the interruption of the dying man's groans, and over the silence of his exhaustion; while friends anxiously stoop to see if the breathing has ceased, and when it has ceased; as if in contempt of the first bursts of passionate grief in the bereaved, and of indifference to the mute despair by which the passion may be followed: always, and everywhere, that eternal tick of the clock remains the same. With movement enough and rhythm enough to seem sentient, a clock is as impassible as a mass of cast iron which has been lying for ages in the same place; it is as indifferent as the Pyramids themselves.

After all, these clocks are only our obedient servants. They are the faithful registrars of time. It is Time which is so ruthless—so sternly indifferent. And yet this sternness of Time is God's kindness through Time. Like the good surgeon, who cannot afford to weep with his patient while he uses his knife, but who uses it unflinchingly as the only possible way of using it beneficially, so Time deals with his subjects. Thus it comes to pass that the man loved much of his God fails even as others. It is only our mistake when we cry, as we are all apt to cry, and that with little more variation than the two sisters

of Bethany, "Lord, if THOU hadst been here, my brother had not died." God was with Joshua in the triumphs of Jordan, of Jericho, of Ai, of Beth-horon, and of Hazor; for all that, Joshua's end was coming fast. God would have His people inherit a better Canaan than any down here, and the way into that also lies through a wilderness and across a river—the wilderness of decay and the Jordan of death.

**II. An old man taught by God to regard his age as a motive for diligence.** There was yet another great work for Joshua to do; he was to divide the entire land of Canaan among the people, and God virtually reminded His servant that if this were to be done at all it must be done at once. Many Christians seem to think it quite enough to have been active in early life, and quite becoming to do almost nothing when a ripened experience and a maturer wisdom might enable them to render to the Church a more valuable service than ever. It is recorded of John Wesley, that preaching one evening at Lowestoft, when he was exceedingly old and infirm, he was attended, and almost supported, in the pulpit by a young minister on each side. "The chapel was crowded to suffocation. In the course of the sermon he repeated, though with an application of his own, the lines from Anacreon:

> 'Oft am I by woman told,
> Poor Anacreon! thou grow'st old;
> See, thine hairs are falling all;
> Poor Anacreon! how they fall!
> Whether I grow old or no,
> By these signs I do not know;
> By this I need not be told
> 'Tis time TO LIVE, if I grow old.'"

Perhaps no better example of diligence in old age has ever been given to men than that set by Wesley. Other aged men might think it "time to die," or, at least, "time to be idle," when burdened with the weight of many years; he found in his passing strength a renewed call to Christian earnestness. The aged, also, have their duties. They should hear in their infirmities the reiteration of their Lord's word: "The night cometh when no man can work." God teaches aged Joshua that he can yet serve his fellows by dividing the land.

**III. A diligent man, who had been diligent all his life, having to feel that he must leave much of his work to others.** Joshua had been led to regard the work of driving out the Canaanites as peculiarly his own. Now it had become evident that he must leave the work incomplete. No doubt God intended this. He had wise purposes yet to fulfil through the people who were unsubdued. To Joshua, however, it must have seemed, at times, as though his own special work had to be left in an unfinished state. Thus, too, was Moses called away. He had been called by God to lead the Israelites into Canaan; he was summoned away while they were yet in the wilderness. There are thousands who seem called to some great life-work, and who, when only well into the midst of it, have to retire from it, saying like Job, "My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart." 1. *Men should set themselves no work in life in which they would not be overtaken by infirmity and death.* Failure of strength comes irrespective of the task in which men spend their strength. The most miserable outlook which this life can unfold to any man is at that point of infirm helplessness in the present from which not a few have to look backwards on many years which have been worse than useless, and forwards to an eternity which is utterly hopeless. 2. *Life, and history, and Scripture, alike join in saying to every man, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."* The young are apt to think that whatever else they may want, they have plenty of time; the aged get to feel that there is nothing which they need so much.

> "Youth is not rich in time, it may be poor:
> Part with it as with money, sparing; pay
> No moment, but in purchase of its worth:
> And what its worth, ask death-beds, they can tell." *Young.*

He who would not feel bankrupt in the possession of time when standing on the margin of eternity, should learn to change each available moment, as it passes, into the imperishable wealth

of something done for his fellows, and thus for his God. That is the only wealth of ours which can be ferried to the other side, and that alone will have any kind of currency with the Lord of Life who awaits us there; for while our entrance into His presence will be all of His work, and not at all of our own, yet has he been pleased to announce His readiness to read our faith in Himself through true service rendered to His people, and to greet each believing worker with the welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

**IV. A man with his life nearly done and his labour unfinished able to rest in the love of God both for himself and his work.** Whatever frailty might have overtaken Joshua physically, and whatever of incompleteness might be manifest in the great task of his life, everything was rendered beautiful by his relation to God. After speaking of the appearance of some of our English ruins which he had been visiting, and of the delight which they had given him even in their decay, Nathaniel Hawthorne exclaims: "Oh that we could have ivy in America! What is there to beautify us when our time of ruin comes?" That which is outward may bear marks of decay; yet it may be even more beautiful in its ruins than it has ever been in its strength. "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." Beautiful as is Joshua's life in its strength, it is nowhere more beautiful than in the integrity and faith attending this closing work of his life (*e.g.* chapters xxii. 1—6, xxiii., xxiv.). He who walks always in the obedience of faith and the joy of love will be ever moving into a life more peaceful to himself, and more beautiful to those by whom he is surrounded.

Verses 2—6.—THE LORD'S INTEREST IN THE UNFINISHED LABOURS OF HIS SERVANTS.

The verses suggest for consideration the following thoughts:—

**I. The items of our unfulfilled labour as being all observed and counted by God.** Philistia, Phœnicia, and the region of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon were not yet subdued. God saw all that had been conquered, and all that was unconquered. The very boundaries describing the uncompleted labour are carefully defined. It is well that our prayers should also have regard to the "things which we have left undone."

**II. Our unfulfilled labour as being met by the promised help of God.** "*Them will I drive out,*" etc. (ver. 6). God is not unconcerned about that which His servants have done. He also, as well as they, regards with interest the work which they have been unable to finish. He meets His servants' desires touching their unfinished work both with sympathy and with promises.

**III. The promises of God as being only fulfilled to His servants when they walk with God.** Some parts of this territory never were subdued by the Israelites. Occasionally they lost some land which had been conquered. This was in strict accordance with God's word, which had repeatedly declared that all the people should not be driven out if the Israelites transgressed.

**IV. The promises of God, where they are unfulfilled through His servants' sins, becoming the very ground on which His servants sufferings are most severe.** Some of these very people whose defeat was covenanted to Israel by this promise, became the source of Israel's greatest pain and shame in the future (cf. Numb. xxxiii. 55; Judges ii. 1—5; x. 6—9; xiii. 1; 1 Sam. iv.). When Balaam went to curse the Israelites, he could only bless them. With God for them, the false-hearted prophet could only cry, "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?" With God for us, there can be no curse against us; with God against us, our very blessings may become the sorest curse of all (Mal. ii. 2). An unfulfilled promise should be a cause of fear. Something must be wrong when the word of the faithful God is found returning void.

"God orders the whole inheritance to be divided into tribes, and the whole line of the Mediterranean coast which

was possessed by the enemy to be put into the lot. A division of this kind might indeed seem absurd and ludicrous, nay, a complete mockery, seeing they were dealing among themselves with the property of others just as if it had been their own. But the Lord so appointed for the best of reasons.

"*First.* They might have cast away the hope of the promise, and been contented with their present state. Nay, although after the lot was cast they had security in full for all that God had promised, they by their own cowardice, as far as in them lay, destroyed the credit of His words. Nor was it owing to any merit of theirs that His veracity did not lie curtailed and mutilated. The allocation by lot must therefore have been to them an earnest of certain possession so as to keep them always in readiness for it.

"*Secondly.* Those who happened to have their portion assigned in an enemy's country, inasmuch as they were living in the meanwhile as strangers on precarious hospitality beyond their own inheritance, must have acted like a kind of taskmasters spurring on the others. And it surely implied excessive stupor to neglect and abandon what had been divinely assigned to them.

"*Thirdly.* It was also necessary that the seat of each tribe should be allocated while Joshua was alive, because after his death the Israelites would have been less inclined to obedience; for none of his successors possessed authority sufficient for the execution of so difficult a task." [*Calvin.*]

## OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 8—33.

Verses 8—12. THE INHERITANCE ON THE EAST OF JORDAN.

The communication of God to Joshua closes at the end of the seventh verse. The Divine utterances are followed by the author's personal reference to the inheritance of the Reubenites, of the Gadites, and of the remaining half tribe of Manasseh, on the other side of Jordan. Verses 9—12 give a general definition of this eastern territory, which is more minutely specified in the latter half of the chapter.

The repetition in the eighth verse, contained in the words, "As Moses the servant of the Lord gave them," must not be regarded as meaningless. It appears designed to emphasise the fact that Moses had acted *as the servant of Jehovah* in that particular assignment of the eastern possessions already made. The inheritance of the nine and a half tribes was decided *by lot;* that of the two and a half tribes seems to have been ordered according to the judgment of Moses (chap. xiv. 2, 3). The Israelites undoubtedly believed in God's guidance of the lot, the unerring direction of which had been so solemnly attested in the discovery of Achan. From these early instances in which God gave witness that He guided the lot, it most likely became a common faith that "the whole disposing thereof was of the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 33; xviii. 18). Lest it might afterwards be thought that God had not decided the respective positions of the two and a half tribes also, it is here emphatically asserted that Moses had acted as Jehovah's servant. God provides not only for His people's possessions, but likewise for their peace.

Verse 13. This verse indicates that the book of Joshua was not written till after the time when it might have been expected that the Geshurites and Maachathites would have been expelled. But the phrase "unto this day" may only point to a few years later than the time of the general conquest. The king of Maachah was able to lead a thousand men against Joab in the time of David (2 Sam. x. 6); but after the defeat of Hadarezer, Maachah, with the neighbouring small states, probably became tributary to David (2 Sam. viii. 5, 6; x. 19). As after this no more is heard of either Geshur or Maachah, and individual Maachathites are occasionally mentioned among the warriors of Israel,

it seems natural to suppose that these petty kingdoms were attached to Israel by David.

Verse 14. THE LEVITES.

The Levites, unlike the rest of the tribes, were to have no detached portion of the land as a separate inheritance. Instead of this, they were to have their inheritance in the religious offerings of all Israel, and in the eight and forty cities, scattered throughout Canaan, in which they were permitted to reside.

We see in these Levites,

I. **Men called to special service for God, and specially exempted from the cares and responsibilities of secular life.**

II. **Men called to spiritual service for their fellows, and to be liberally cared for by their fellows.**

The New Testament makes no effort to maintain the old Levitical machinery as a means of providing for those who minister in spiritual things; it certainly does maintain the principle of such provision. The machinery was necessarily temporary; the idea which the machinery worked was essentially as lasting as the necessity it was intended to meet. Some think that gifts for religious work should not be taken from irreligious men. No man has a right to judge who is religious enough to give and who is not. Every man's gift to religion is to some extent an acknowledgment of religion, and in that measure is religious. Apart from the inability and sin of Christians who do not hesitate to sit in judgment on their fellows, no wicked man's wickedness, however wicked he may be, exempts him from the duty of making personal sacrifices to support the worship and service of God in the land of which he is a citizen. A man's wickedness exonerates him from no religious duty whatever. Every day in which a man lives in unbelief he is under obligation to believe; when he blasphemes, he is still bound to worship; when he lies, the obligation to be truthful is as fully upon him as ever; when he withholds his temporal things from service which God designs to be an eternal good to those around him, and whom he himself has helped to deprave, he is as much bound to give for religious work as the godliest man living. No rebel becomes free to rebel by rebelling, or ceases to be amenable to taxation for the crown by saying that he believes in a republic. No wicked Israelite was free to withhold his part in supporting the worship of God, because his personal love of transgression, or of his property, made any gift to the Levites distasteful. Probably God sets little value on the gifts for His service which are offered by a wicked man; yet when a wicked man tries to do what is right in anything, no other man is justified in hindering him; certainly no Christian man should dare to offer an unseemly rebuff to a fellow-man who is seeking even in one thing to discharge his conscience towards God. The Saviour, who saw in the Pharisees only "bruised reeds" and "smoking flax," would neither break them in the one sense, nor quench them in the other. True, the Pharisees had not much religion left, but even Christ did not forbid them the little they had on the ground that they had only that little.

Verse 22. THE WAGES OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

The Apostle Peter tells us that Balaam "loved the wages of unrighteousness." The hope of gain had induced Balaam to leave his home in Pethor of Mesopotamia (Deut. xxiii. 4), and come to the aid of the king of Moab. It is probable that the reward given to the false prophet was large; and, thus far, his expectations may have been satisfied. The real reward of his iniquity was yet to come. "The wages of sin is death," and Baalam gives an example of the way in which these words may have a physical as well as a moral fulfilment. The connection between Balaam's sin and his death is repeatedly and strongly marked in Scripture. The war against the Midianites was avowedly a war of retribution, and the death of Balaam is mentioned as that of the principal offender (Num. xxxi. 8, 8, 16). It seems named here for the same reason; the man had wrought great evil against Israel, and his death was the outcome of his wicked counsel. The successive

stages of Balaam's guilt and its consequences may be thus noticed. We see —

**I. A weak man tempted to sin, and tempted where he was weakest.**— 1. *Temptation ever comes to men on the side on which they are least able to resist.* A soldier may invest a fortress on all sides; he directs the strength of his assault where there are fewest means of defence. The man who loved the wages of unrighteousness was tempted with that which he loved. Men who are willing to run "greedily after the error of Balaam for reward," are tempted in like manner with Balaam. Judas carried the bag and was a thief, and forthwith came the opportunity to sell Christ. Each man is tempted in the direction of his peculiar weakness. David was a man warm-hearted and enthusiastic, and the attack which overthrew him was on the least fortified side of his nature. Peter was at once ardent, impulsive, and possessed of a certain pride of manliness. Nothing would be so likely to betray him into falling as a sudden attack in the direction of shame. The point of weakness was the point of assault. Of the particular temptation before which Balaam fell, Addison well remarked: "A man who is furnished with arguments from the mint will convince his antagonist much sooner than one who draws them from reason and philosophy. Gold is a wonderful clearer of the understanding; it dissipates every doubt and scruple in an instant, accommodates itself to the meanest capacities, silences the loud and clamorous, and brings over the most obstinate and inflexible. Philip of Macedon was a man of most invincible reason this way. He refuted by it all the wisdom of Athens, confounded their statesmen, struck their orators dumb, and at length argued them out of their liberties." 2. *Most kinds of temptation come to every man, and temptation is strong or weak, according to the state of the heart that is tempted.* A recent writer narrates an incident which aptly illustrates this. "Years ago, in Cheshire, some new plants, quite unknown before in the neighbourhood, sprang up beside the canals by which the salt was carried, and in pools around the salt works. The people did not know what to make of this phenomenon. At last, some one who had lived by the seaside recognised the plants as identical in kind with those which haunt the ledges of the rocks just above the flow of the tide, but within wash of the spray. Then the thing was clear. The germs of the plants had been from year to year borne by the wind, or carried by birds, to that place, but the conditions under which they could grow had not arisen. By-and-by the same conditions which prevailed on the sea-coast were fulfilled, and the germs which formerly had died took root and grew. Remove those conditions, and though the germs are brought there at intervals, they will not develop into life." Thus the seeds of temptation are scattered far and wide. Most temptations, sooner or later, fall into the heart of every man. It depends on the state of the heart into which they fall whether they spring up and grow into destroying sins, or whether they die in the very beginnings of life. Earth has only known one Heart in which no seed of this kind ever even so much as germinated at all. Of Christ only has it been written, "Who did no sin." Balaam received his temptation, and forthwith, in such fruitful soil, the seed grew apace. 3. *No man is any stronger than the place where he is weakest.* We are apt to measure the strength of our life by those traits of our character which are most promising. One man is benevolent, and he thinks of his whole manhood as in keeping with the compassion in which, possibly, he prides himself. Another man is strong in honesty, and by him the strength of his integrity is apt to be regarded as though it were the measure of the strength of all his manhood. The earnest evangelist, whom men call "a revivalist," has not seldom been found taking it for granted that his Christian character is as strong all round as it is in that particular point in which he has been found to be peculiarly successful. Men look at the strong place of their life, and then go into temptation, forgetting the weak side of their temperament and disposition. It is as though

a ship of war should be armour-plated over only some half a dozen square yards, and her captain should guide her into a conflict, thinking only of the small space through which the enemy's shot could not penetrate, and forgetting that a ball in any other part of the vessel might sink him and his crew almost immediately. It is as if a miner should gauge the strength of his chain by a few stout links, and load the cradle by which he himself was about to descend, almost up to their breaking strain, heedless of the average power of the chain, and not concerning himself in the least about such links as were specially weak. An engine-driver who would avoid an explosion must have regard to the weakest part of his boiler. The girder of the bridge which spans the river is only as strong as where it is weakest. According to the axiom of the engineers, "the weakest is the strongest." So should every man estimate his own character. He only is strong who watches, and prays, and fortifies himself where he is weak.

**II. A tempted man restrained by God, and restrained earnestly and continuously.**—The history in Numbers shews us how graciously God had interposed to prevent Balaam from this miserable end. 1. *God restrained Balaam by the power of conscience.* When the elders of Moab and Midian first tempted the prophet, he seems instinctively to have felt that it would be wrong for him to go on this mission (Numb. xxii. 8). He who overrides his conscience must be prepared to meet and confront it again under less favourable circumstances. Conscience thus outraged, like the ghost of Cæsar before the gaze of the bewildered Brutus, may seem to withdraw for a time; but there is always some Philippi where the sinner will have to look upon it again. 2. *God restrained Balaam by actual words.* "Thou shalt not go with them" (Numb. xxii. 12). All along the ways of iniquity men are opposed by the words of the Lord. It is easy to pass these words; it is hard to repass them, back to the way of holiness. 3. *God restrained Balaam by unusual and marvellous interposition.* The dumb ass was made to speak, and the armed angel stood between this man and the consummation of his iniquity. Providence has still its extraordinary calls. Accidents, sicknesses, bereavements. Even these may be passed. The very angels must make way for the man who is determined to sin. It could not be otherwise. Sin may be prevented by warnings only when a man will accept the warning; goodness is not at the command of swords, even when they are celestial. The persecutors of the old days might have learned a useful lesson from this retiring angel. Every wilful man may learn, no less, for himself, that God's warnings stop short of coercion. The sword which Divine love puts across the path of the man who will go on to sin, is but the shadow of the "coming event" which heaven's mercy thus casts before him, that he may turn again by the way which he came. 4. *God restrained Balaam by a continuous influence, which to a certain point was all-powerful to hold this bad man back.* Three times did Balak build for Balaam seven altars, on each of which was offered a bullock and a ram, but Balaam could only say, "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?" Most men have felt this restraining influence of the Almighty. God does not seek to compel men to be good; but where He will, He does hold men back from wickedness. He can say, even to the most violent desires and passions of the vilest, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther."

**III. A man restrained by God evading restraint, and sinning while appearing to obey.**—Balaam only submitted to the restraint outwardly; he did not curse Israel, because he could not; but the curse was in his heart all the while. Mark a few points touching the man's spiritual failure. 1. *Balaam's religion was negative rather than positive.* He did not say, What can I do for God? How can I serve men? He preferred to put the case thus: Where must I obey God? What commandments must I keep? See where this spirit of mere commandment-keeping ends. A man may go on like Balaam saying, If I should have given

to me my house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, and yet come to an end as terrible and sad as this. 2. *Balaam's piety consisted of only so much obedience as might serve to keep him from harm.* He sought to go as near to sin as possible without getting smitten. Religion is not a moderate love of the world; it is not moderate luxury, moderate avarice, moderate ambition, moderate selfishness; it is not in asking, How much of the world may I have, and yet get to heaven? "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." The overflowing Nile renders Egypt fertile; the overflowing of the world in a human heart causes spiritual barrenness and death. 3. *Balaam's religion was made up of feelings of duty rather than of thoughts of love.* He "loved the wages of unrighteousness." His heart was yearning to curse because of gain. Duty may be a good and sufficient word for ordinary conflicts. Nelson hung it out at the masthead of his ship for a battle signal, and dying said, "Thank God, I have done my duty." But the stern warrior was moved to conflict by something more than the sense of duty. He loved his duty, and loved the nation which he served; otherwise even his conflicts had not so often ended in victory. The Christian has a sterner fight—a fight with foes unseen and innumerable. Let others do as they will, he can only triumph by love. 4. *Balaam's religion lay merely in fearing God rather than in desiring God's glory.* Only fear kept him from pronouncing the curse outright. We are told that "The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom;" but he will be very foolish who lets his wisdom end there. Fear may do well enough for the beginning of the way, but only the love of God can keep a man to the end. David ardently desired to glorify God, and was restored from sin's lowest depths; Solomon was enamoured of his own glory, and his end is sad and obscure. Peter loved his Lord with passionate fervour, and we see him go from his denial to the Sea of Tiberias, and thence into the joy of Pentecost and the mellow godliness of his epistles; Judas loved the bag, and he went and hanged himself.

**IV. A man sinning while simulating obedience, and the sin working steadily towards death and ending in death.**—From the time when Balaam started on this mission of cursing, he was unconsciously drawing near to his end. Each step was so much near to the time when he should lie a ghastly corpse on the battle-field of Midian. Added to this constant approach to the place where he should be slain, there was a concurrent movement towards spiritual death. Every hour of inward yearning to do what God had bidden him not to do was an hour of spiritual decay. Thus Balaam went on till he was able to give his fiendish counsel to the Midianites, and probably to rejoice in the terrible success which attended it. The dead body upon the battle-field was only a symbol and a consequence of the dead spirituality which it had once covered. The man was dead every way. 1. *Learn that sin in the heart will presently come out in the life.* There comes a time when wickedness cherished in the heart will burst its way through the thin crust of a mere outward obedience, and, like some terrible Vesuvius, will pour out the hidden material of many years in a destroying lava—molten at last into that by the fierce fires of a long-encouraged passion. 2. *Learn also that God will not always warn.* There comes a time when He bids His dumb creatures speak to wilful sinners no more, when He stands no more angels in their path to destruction, and when His own forbidding voice ceases to be heard. Again it might be written, in this case with another meaning, "There was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour." This silence of heaven is very awful. It is the pause in the spiritual world which immediately precedes the storm of judgment. Let those who hear nothing more from heaven be alarmed. "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee." Behold, in the similar silence of nature, they flee every one to his haunt! So let him who has ceased to hear the voices of God flee to the riven Rock of Ages. Let him hear in the very silence

of heaven the final invitation of Jehovah, "Enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast."

Verses 23—32.—THE INHERITANCE OF REUBEN, GAD, AND THE HALF-TRIBE OF MANASSEH.

The boundaries of these tribes whose possessions were "on the other side of Jordan" are as carefully defined as those of the tribes who inherited the land originally promised.

1. God's people are His people everywhere. The people were not for the land, but the land was for the people.

2. God's care of His people is irrespective of place. One side of Jordan or the other, it matters not, so long as they walk in the knowledge and love of Him.

3. God's care of His people provides for their peace with each other. Lest disputes should arise, the territory of each tribe is, from the first, carefully marked. Lest the Levites should afterwards claim some of the land for a possession, they are repeatedly told, as in verses 14, 33, that their inheritance was to be in the Lord God of Israel. Peace also is meant to be a part of the earthly inheritance of the children of God.

Verses 14, 33.—THE INHERITANCE OF THE TRIBE OF LEVI.

This exclusion of the Levites from any possession in the land, and the assurance that they had in some way beyond their brethren an inheritance in the Lord God of Israel, we find repeatedly mentioned in the books of Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. The emphasis which is laid on the arrangement shews unmistakably that it was deemed by God Himself to be one of unusual importance. Two distinct features are made prominent in this regulation on behalf of the Levites. God shews us—

I. **Men with special religious work having as great an exemption as possible from secular anxieties.** The Levites were only to have certain "cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for their cattle and for their substance" (chap. xiv. 4). They were not to be cumbered with the cares of business, nor burdened with the anxieties of great earthly possessions. Living to serve their fellows, they were to be maintained by their fellows. "They were to have no territorial possessions. In place of them they were to receive from the others the tithes of the produce of the land, from which they, in their turn, offered a tithe to the priests, as a recognition of their higher consecration (Numb. xviii. 21—26; Neh. x. 37)." [*Smith's Bib. Dict.*] Is this system of tithes obligatory now? The chief answer to this question must be derived from Scripture itself. There is nothing whatever in the New Testament to perpetuate the practice. It is recognised as binding down to the very time of the last of the prophets (Mal. iii. 10), and then all mention of it, as a duty, suddenly ceases. Not a word urging it is said either by Christ or His apostles. The continuance of the system of tithing by some churches might form, from an ecclesiastical point of view, a singular and interesting study on the recent doctrine of "the survival of the fittest." The Saviour's abolition of the Levitical ceremonial is distinctly recognised, but with a theological discernment which says much for their ingenuity, many ecclesiastics who make no question about the abolition of the Levitical service, have no doubt at all of the continued obligation of the Levitical dues. They have no thought of the whole service of the Church being confined to a single family, nor of "the priesthood" being limited to a particular branch of that family; the old law of hereditary succession is abrogated, the ancient service itself has expired, only the payments have survived. Among several grave reasons against the continuance of a system which God evidently designed to be limited to the Old Testament dispensation, only one other need be mentioned here. The Jewish theocracy contemplated the unquestioning submission of every Israelite to the law of Moses. No room was left for dissent or difference, as the fate of Korah and his companions so terribly

attested. The very idea of a theocracy was essentially an idea of uniformity. The personal and almost immediate rule of God, to whose actual presence with the people mighty works were continually bearing witness, necessarily supposed a universal and uniform obedience. The Gospel comes to men with all the old responsibilities touching obedience, but with a vastly enlarged measure of liberty. Christianity is emphatically a choice, not a compulsion. Christ stands by even His twelve apostles, and, while others are actually departing, says to them too, "Will ye also go away?" They could if they would. The sharply defined commands of the law of Moses stand out in strange contrast to the tender pleadings and tears of Jesus, and the very pathos of the Saviour's entreaties supposes the misused liberty of those who so long rejected them. Under the Old Testament, and to the extent of those limits covered by the theocracy, the Church was the world; under the Gospel, the Church is in the world. In a word, under the Old Testament system, which regarded every Israelite as bound under severe penalties to serve God, the tithing of all Israel was logical and natural; under the Gospel, which appeals to men for voluntary discipleship, the compulsory and indiscriminate tithing of men, irrespective of the fact that many of them may reject the Gospel, carries an untruth upon its very face. It is, virtually, making Christ to say, "I give you liberty to accept the Gospel, or not; I give you no liberty whatever in the matter of paying for its support;" a position which would degrade the Saviour by the suggestion that His mercenary concern about human gifts was so much in excess of His spiritual concern for the souls for which He died.

While, however, the method of supporting those who minister in religious service essentially differs under the two dispensations, the principle laid down here is not lost sight of in the New Testament. "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." Those who devote their lives to the spiritual welfare of their fellows are, no less than the Levites of old, to be set as free as possible from the anxieties of procuring the necessaries of life.

II. **Men with special religious necessities and peculiar spiritual privileges.** 1. *The Lord God is the inheritance of all who serve God.* Every true Israelite had a portion in the Lord. (*a*) Men may participate in this inheritance irrespective of family. Judah, Simeon, Ephraim, Levi, or either of the other tribes—it mattered not which—all might seek and find a possession in God. This most glorious of all estates came through no particular parentage, as such. (*b*) Men may participate in this inheritance, notwithstanding past history. The degradation of Egypt. The sins of the wilderness. Grace hides the past, blotting out even the worst transgressions. (*c*) Men cannot participate in this inheritance without regard to the present. Only a godly heart and a godly life can inherit God. When Israel forsook the Lord, the fact that they were known as God's people did not secure them an inheritance in Him. This estate cannot be "conveyed" to a heart without love, or to a life devoid of holiness. 2. *This Divine inheritance is ever adapted to the variety and stress of human want.* The Levites were called to serve their brethren in a most responsible work, and God promised Himself to them for a peculiar possession. With God for an inheritance, and a heart right towards Him, great spiritual wants do but make way for a large measure of Divine mercy and help. 3. *Thus he who has God for his inheritance may well feel satisfied, though all else seems to fail him.* It was out of the cave, when hunted by Saul, that David cried unto the Lord: "Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living." (Cf. also Ps. xvi. 5, 6; lxxiii. 26.) Still more remarkable is the similar expression of faith by Jeremiah in Lam. iii. 24. In his case we see an aged man with nothing else left, after forty years of apparently fruitless labour, and as many of pious experience with no strength or opportunity to begin his work over again, still rejoicing in God. Sitting in the streets of desolate Jerusalem, when all her inhabitants had been carried away captive, the aged prophet,

with a sorrow beautiful in its humanness and a faith magnificent in its trust, cries out in one and the same song of grief: "Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people;" "The Lord is my portion saith my soul, therefore will I hope in Him." Thus, like stars on the dark face of the night, does God shew us the jewels of His people's faith shining forth from the setting of broken earthly hopes and utter destitution. So good Rutherford speaks to us from one of his letters: "I know not what you have if you want Christ; I know not what you want if you have Christ." The Levites were at once the poorest and the richest tribe of Israel. They had no earthly estate in the land; they had a peculiar portion in God, who provided for their temporal wants, and who stood ready to give Himself to them specially in those necessities created by their religious service for their brethren.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *DIVISION OF THE LAND WEST OF JORDAN.—THE INHERITANCE OF CALEB.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—The section of the history which is introduced in the first five verses of this chapter terminates with chap. xix., and deals with the division of the land lying between the Jordan and the Mediterranean, among the nine and a half tribes. **1. Eleazar the priest]** He was solemnly set apart to this office in Mount Hor, just before the death of his father. As the distribution of the land was to be by lot, Eleazar the priest is named before Joshua. This, too, is the order in which the names occur in Numb. xxxiv. 17. As Keil points out: "In every other respect, even in the distribution of the land, Joshua was at the head of the commission appointed for that purpose, as we may clearly see from ver. 6, chap. xvii. 14, xviii. 3." The high priest only had precedence in things purely sacred. To consult God was the first step in dividing the land, and this was to be done by God's high priest. **Heads of the fathers of the tribes]** Called "princes" in Numb. xxxiv. 18, following which the ten names of the representatives are given. **4. The children of Joseph were two tribes]** Levi not being counted. This is stated to show how the number of *twelve* tribes was nevertheless preserved in the territorial division. **Cities . . . with their suburbs]** The extent of these suburbs was to be one thousand cubits beyond the city wall, in each direction (Numb. xxxv. 4, 5). The difficulty of the verses in Numbers is well explained by Keil. **Therefore they gave]** *Heb.* = "And they gave." It is not said that this was the reason why the Levites had no portion of territory. **6. Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite]** "A very interesting question arises as to the birth and parentage of Caleb. He is, as we have seen, styled 'the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite,' and his younger brother Othniel, afterwards the first Judge, is also called 'the son of Kenaz' (Josh. xv. 17; Judges i. 13. iii. 9, 11). On the other hand, the genealogy in 1 Chron. ii. makes no mention whatever of either Jephunneh or Kenaz, but represents Caleb, though obscurely, as being a descendant of Hezron and a son of Hur (see, too, chap. iv.). Again, in Josh. xv. 13, we have this singular expression, 'Unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a part *among the children of Judah*;' and in xiv. 14, the no less significant one, 'Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh *the Kenezite*, because that he wholly followed Jehovah *God of Israel*.' It becomes therefore quite possible that Caleb was a foreigner by birth, a proselyte incorporated into the tribe of Judah." [*Smith's Bib. Dict.*] See also Crosby's remarks, *in loc.*, on the similar conjecture of Lord Hervey. **The thing that the Lord said unto Moses]** Comparing Numb. xiii. 22, xiv. 24; Deut. i. 36, with this plea offered by Caleb, it seems sufficiently clear that God had promised Hebron to Caleb for a possession. **7. As it was in mine heart]** "The expression evidently denotes sincerity, the heart being thus opposed to deceitful words. He acted honestly according to the command given him, without gloss or dissimulation." [*Calvin.*] **9. Surely the land, *etc.*]** Although Hebron is not named in any of the verses in the Pentateuch which refer to the mission of the spies, it seems to have been mentioned to Caleb in the promise of Moses, the written history being only an epitome of that which actually took place. **10. These forty and five years]** Thirty-eight of these were spent in the wilderness, and the remaining seven had been occupied in the conquest of the land. This is the most important of the chronological data afforded by the book. **12. This mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day]** Shewing, as suggested under verses, 6, 9, that Hebron and its neighbourhood had been mentioned by name in the Divine promise. **14. Unto this day]** "The book of Joshua was therefore written while Caleb still lived." [*Crosby.*] This, however, is by no means certain; for there is, at least, the possibility

of correctness in Keil's remark: "In verses 14, 15, the author appends to some observations of his own, the narrative, which he has copied verbatim from the original documents." **15. The name of Hebron before was Kirjath Arba]** "City of Arba." Hengstenberg contends that the original name was Hebron, that Arba, with the Anakim, did not found the city, but conquered it, and that not till after the time of Abraham's residence there (cf. Gen. xxiii. 2; Numb. xiii. 22). **The land had rest from war]** This is repeated from chap. xi. 23, shewing that the further division of the land was unaccompanied with any *general conflict* with the Canaanites who remained unsubdued.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1—5.

### God's Choice of His People's Inheritance.

The principal topic of these verses is the division by lot of the inheritance of the nine and a half tribes. The lot was of the Lord; the details of the method in which it was obtained are not stated. Probably the process was carried on at the door of the tabernacle, and presided over by Eleazar, the high priest. Further than this we know little. The Rabbins think that two urns were used, one containing the names of the districts to be chosen, and the other the names of the tribes, a simultaneous selection being made from each urn. The employment of two urns, however, is a mere speculation. The operation would have been equally definite had the representative of each tribe drawn for his people the name of the district from one urn. However the process may have been conducted, the issue was directed by Jehovah. "The lot was cast into the lap" (*lit.*, "bosom," perhaps meaning that of the vessel or garment employed); "but the whole disposing thereof was of the Lord."

Looking in a general way at the subject of the verses, the following thoughts are suggested:—

I. **An insignificant lot, feeble creatures to occupy it, and the lot, nevertheless, chosen by God.** The Jews fully believed in the Divine guidance in this form. In the solemn judgment of Achan, the question, to them, must have been placed altogether beyond doubt. Scripture continually teaches that God directly affords His guidance to men, and that in other matters than on occasions like this. "In *all* thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." 1. *God's choice of our lots in this life is no fiction, but an evident reality.* It is not manifest and visible; it is nevertheless placed beyond doubt. No eye could see the hand of God within the urn from which the princes made their selection; that hand was there notwithstanding. It is thus always. We can never pronounce upon this as we look at the process; we can often speak confidently as we mark the results. Taking this case, for instance, of the dividing of the land, compare the prophetic blessings of Jacob and Moses with the issues of the lot. "The portion, says Masius," as reported by Dr. Clarke, "fell to each tribe just as Jacob had declared two hundred and fifty years before, in the last moments of his life, and Moses immediately before his death; for to the tribe of Judah fell a country abounding in vineyards and pastures; to Zebulon and Issachar, sea coasts; in that of Asher was plenty of oil, wheat, and metals; that of Benjamin, near to the temple, was, in a manner, between the shoulders of the Deity; Ephraim and Manasseh were distinguished with a territory blessed in a peculiar manner by heaven; the land of Naphtali extended from the west to the south of the tribe of Judah" (cf. chap. xix. 34). While there is some difficulty as to the case of Naphtali, the general correctness of this description of agreement is unquestionable. In the same way who can fail to see God's guidance and choice in the lot of Abraham, of Joseph, of Moses, or of Cyrus. Similarly Christ marked out the future of some of His apostles. He said of John words which seemed to intimate a long life; to Peter, "Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird

thee;" and, not least noteworthy, of Paul, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." No less does God choose the lot of His servants now. The unseen process. The reality of the fact. 2. *This concern of God in the lot which men shall occupy in life is very wonderful in its condescension.* How glorious is the universe over which Jehovah rules! How insignificant must any one of these little divisions of Canaan have appeared to Him! How frail, physically and religiously, were the creatures who were to occupy these little lots! For what a mere point of time, to Him who is the Eternal, could they hold them! How very wonderful does Divine condescension appear as we see the Divine attention seemingly concentrated for century after century on these few lots of land in Palestine, which pass successively towards, into, and through the hands of so many occupants! What a mere morsel of a lot each individual life is concerned with, and for what a mere moment of time is the lot held by any particular life! Yet all this is but a picture, taken from the gallery of Providence by the hand of Revelation, and held out to the gaze of men. It is only a section, and that given but in outlines, of a long panoramic view of God's care of human lives, which began with Adam, which has never ceased with any one of his descendants, which is being extended to-day, and in which, it may be, the redeemed shall presently, through the ages of eternity, examine with wonder, awe, and admiration, the wisdom, patience, and love displayed in God's marvellous care for His creatures. II. **Many lots, and many would-be choosers, but the choice of the Lord the only choice worth following.** Men see about them in life an endless variety of conditions, and not a few think the lot of their neighbour better than their own. Men and women cry out not only for a "changed cross," but for a changed lot. Contrary to what they feel to be the leadings of Providence, not a few try to force their way through life in some other direction. They have no care to study the will of God, and not unfrequently try to avoid it. Either here or hereafter, the sorrowful issues of a course like this cannot but disclose its folly. The following things should be borne in mind touching the choice of God:—1. *It is the choice of one who knows us perfectly.* We know little of ourselves. Every day's experience proves this. The very proverbs which have obtained an abiding place in our literature prove it: "Man, know thyself;" "The greatest study of mankind is man," etc. God knows how much we can bear; how much prosperity, how much adversity, how much change, how much monotony. He knows us altogether. 2. *It is the choice of one who sees our lot as perfectly as He knows ourselves.* We can see no distance before us. We cannot take into the account what our great poet calls the "millioned accidents" which intervene between our plans and their results, and "blunt the sharpest intents." All these, even as we ourselves, are "naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." 3. *It is the choice of one who prepares our lot beforehand.* The lot of our lives is no haphazard thing. God had been four hundred and thirty years preparing these lots for the Israelites. From the call of Abraham onward, a hundred events shew the careful preparation of the Lord. 4. *It is the choice of one who ever holds our lot well within His own control.* Nothing surprises Him. Nothing defeats His purpose. Nothing escapes without the boundless circle of His management. Nothing changes His benevolent designs. "He is in one mind, who can turn Him?" Only we ourselves, by persistent sin, can break away from His gracious intentions. 5. *It is the choice of one who equally controls all surrounding lots.* All the lots which lie around our own, all events of others which touch upon the events of our own lives, are also at His bidding. And "All things work together for good to them," etc.

These are but items in the list which, could we read it fully, would tell us of His infinite fitness to undertake for us. Let the song of the after ages, from the lips of the descendants of Israel, bear its witness to the blessedness of the choice of the Lord (cf. Ps. xlvii. 1—4). The children of these very people, centuries later, learned to cry out in a great and irrepressible joy: "O clap your hands all

ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph. . . . He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom He loved." III. **The Divine choice of human lots acquiesced in by men, or resisted by men, and God's will alike prevalent in either case.** 1. *Think of God's choice in its interworking with the willing efforts of His own people.* The land was to be divided by lot, but the lot could only point out the district; the extent of its boundaries had to be decided by the leaders of the people. A large tribe was to have much territory; a small tribe was to have little. That was the general rule for the distribution (Numb. xxvi. 51—56; xxxiii. 54). "The lot," says Clericus, "appears to have determined only the situation, but not the size of the fields." So Calvin, Masius, and Keil also expound. God determined the situation, and, saving regulations to guide them, He left men to determine the extent. It is much the same in our lives now. God interworks with the man who follows His will, and while He shapes the life in its main features, He leaves very much to ourselves. He leaves much to our faithfulness in conflicts which yet remain. He leaves much to our energy and industry in daily toil. He leaves much to our judgment, asking us in all difficulties to refer back to Him for further guidance. Thus, Providence is no mere machine which forces us into life, through life, and then presently forces us out of life. We are purposely left to determine much ourselves, thus forming and cultivating and proving our own character. "We are workers together with God." 2. *Consider God's choice in its triumph over those who oppose His will and oppose His people.* Ultimately, as many instances bear testimony, His way prevails. It was thus with Joseph's brethren, with Pharaoh, with Haman, and with others of those who set themselves against the Lord, and against the people whom He called His own. (*a*) It is useless to resist God in His plans for our personal life.

> "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will."—*Hamlet.*

He who wants his own way in life without hindrance, must begin by choosing submission to the way of the Lord.

> "Our wills are ours, we know not how;
> Our wills are ours to make them Thine."—*In Memoriam.*

(*b*) It is equally useless to resist God in His plans for others. One of the greatest instances of this has recently entered upon the pages of history. In order to prevent the escape of their slaves, the American Senate enacted the Fugitive Slave Law, which required, under severe penalties, that no one should harbour the fugitive who was fleeing from bondage, or in any way assist his escape. But God's time for the end of American slavery had come, and the effort to retain it in greater strength did but hasten its overthrow. The operation of the Act is thus described by the late Wm. Arnott: "The stroke which was intended to rivet the fetters of the slave more firmly, guided in its descent by an unseen hand, fell upon a brittle link, and broke it through. The newspapers announced that the cruel device had been enacted into a law. The intelligence fell like a spark on the deep compassion that lay pent up in a woman's heart, and kindled it into a flame. The outburst took the form of a book, the instrument of power usually employed in these later ages of the world. It is certainly true, and is widely known, that the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law produced the book, and that the book caused a panorama of slavery to pass before the eyes of millions in America and Europe, inexpressibly augmenting the public opinion of the civilised world against the whole system, root and branch. Let no one imagine that we are elevating little things into an undue importance; we speak of Jehovah's counsel, and how it stands erect and triumphant over all the devices of men. He is wont to employ weak things to confound the mighty. Long ago He employed the tears of a helpless child and the strong compassion of a woman (Exod. ii. 6) as essential instruments in the

exodus of an injured race, and it would be like Himself if, in our day, while statesmen and armies contend in the senate and the battle-field, He should permit women who remain at home to deal the blow which decides the victory, and distribute the resulting spoil. 'He sits King upon the floods.' 'All are His servants.' 'Stand still and see the salvation of God.'"

Such has ever been the way in which God has made it apparent that "the counsel of the wicked shall not stand." He may work by feeble means, as though He would shew the abundance of His power, but His way must stand. He who opposes the will of God does but hasten his own overthrow (Jer. xiii. 24, 25). In this, as in many things besides, the volume of Divine revelation and that of human history are one.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 1.—Inheriting the Promised Possession.

**I. The promised possession in its reality.** "Which the children of Israel inherited." The promise given to Abram, and repeated through several generations, was not merely a promise. The time for actual inheritance had come at last. God's promises all end in an estate.

**II. The promised possession in its need of faith and patience.** The inheritance had been a long time coming. More than four hundred and fifty years had passed since the Lord called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land, and look upon it as the future home of his people. Canaan was for so long "The Promised Land," that it got to bear that name, a fact not a little significant, intimating, perhaps, something of the long struggle between human hope and human impatience. He who "waits on the Lord" may well wait in confidence. "The vision is yet for an appointed time."

**III. The promised possession in relation to the grace and power of God.** Now that the people had t last come to the inheritance, what a picture was presented in the path behind them of the longsuffering and help of Jehovah. Egypt, the Exodus, the Wilderness, the crossing of the Jordan, the fall of Jericho, and the various victories which followed, were all eloquent of the power of the Divine arm and the love of the Divine heart. What had the people done apart from God? We come into nothing worth holding, saving as we reach it by the same might and the same love. "Not by might, nor by power," etc. As when we look back from each valuable estate in life, we have to feel that God hath wrought all, so when we look forward to blessings for which we wait, let us be willing to accept the Lord's words, "Without Me ye can do nothing."

**IV. The promised possession on earth a possession in which rest is only partial.** The land which Israel was about to divide, could only be entered upon with much care and much conflict. Faith, patience, wisdom, and work were still largely needed. It is ever thus with all estates on earth, not excepting our more spiritual possessions. Rest is broken, not only by toil, but by conflict. We never get an inheritance here in which there are not left some foes to dispute the possession with us.

**V. The promised possession in heaven a possession in which rest is perfect.** "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." It is only at the point of death that we come to the last of our foes, but after that the inheritance is undisputed for ever. We must not think, however, that the rest is free from work. It has no toil, yet it is full of activity. As has been remarked, while Scripture teaches that heaven is perfect rest, it also says of some there, "They rest not day nor night." Inaction must be worse than toil. How blessed must be the activity

which is all prompted by love, which knows no conflict, and which feels no care!

Verse 2.—THE INHERITANCE DIVIDED BY LOT.

I. **The lot of God in its silent and invisible working.** The unseen chariot of Providence is drawn by invisible steeds, and the wheels thereof run noiselessly.

II. **The lot of God in its extensive range.** It dealt with the whole country. Providence has no waste land. Every acre of the universe is under its inspection and cultivation.

III. **The lot of God in its mysterious complexity.** Every single lot had its relation to every other lot, to every year in each succeeding century of Israelitish history, to every inhabitant of the land through all that period, and thus to nations, far and near, outside of Canaan.

IV. **The lot of God in its irreversible issues.** The lot once taken was not to be altered. The ways of Providence shew no hesitation, and suffer no readjustment by men.

V. **The lot of God in its witness to Divine wisdom and love.** The wisdom is corroborated by the song of the generations following (Ps. xlvii.); the love is apparent in the condescension which shews such care at the time, and in the patience which helps and blesses for so long a period afterwards. God not only chooses the portions of His people, but gives them many an after-occasion to sing, "Thou *maintainest* my lot. The lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

THE LOTS NOT ALL DRAWN AT THE SAME TIME.

"It is somewhat remarkable that the casting of the lots was stopped as soon as Judah and Joseph had received their shares. The command of God, that the whole land, even that which had not yet been conquered, should be portioned out amongst the nine tribes and a half (chap. xiii. 1—7), would lead us to expect that when once the casting of the lots had commenced, it would proceed uninterruptedly, until every tribe had received its share; and that it would only have to enter it in reliance upon the Divine promise, and exterminate, or at least subjugate, the Canaanites who still remained. But, instead of this, as soon as the shares had been allotted to two tribes and a half, the camp was removed from Gilgal to Shiloh (chap. xiv. 6, xviii. 1, 9), and the tabernacle set up there; and the other tribes manifested so little anxiety to receive their inheritance, that Joshua had to say to them, 'How long are ye slack to go to possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers hath given you?' He then appointed a commission, consisting of twenty-one men, three from each tribe, and sent them out to survey the country, and bring home a description of it, and to divide it into seven parts. And it was not till after the description of the country, thus arranged according to its cities, had been received, that he was able to proceed with the lot, and distribute to each tribe its appointed share. The reason for this interruption is not stated. Masius (on chap. xv.1—4) thinks it necessary to assume, that after the defeat of the Canaanites in the south and the north, the division of the conquered land was commenced by the territory which fell to the tribes of Judah and Joseph being awarded by lot, without any accurate measurement, and that only the two tribes mentioned, as being the most powerful, were allowed to draw lots for it. By the appropriation of the southern district of Palestine to these tribes, the camp at Gilgal was well guarded from any sudden attack on the part of the enemy; an important precaution, as the other tribes had shewn so little desire to take possession of the inheritance which was hereafter to be assigned to them. The exact distribution of the land was therefore postponed until messengers had been despatched in every direction to make a survey of the country, and to bring back an accurate description. This view is generally approached by Rosenmüller, De Wette, and Lengerke." [*Keil*, pp. 346-7.] To this assumption of Masius, however, Keil very properly objects that "it is at variance with the Divine command to divide the whole country by lot amongst the nine tribes and a half, the unconquered as well as the conquered portions, and almost destroys the value and defeats the purpose of the lot." Probably, as with the seven tribes later on, the lot merely decided the general position to be occupied by Judah, Ephraim, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, leaving the more exact adjustment of territory to be made after the general survey had taken place. This accords best with the subsequent settlement of Simeon within the lot roughly given at first to Judah, and with the subsequent cession of towns and territory made by Judah and Ephraim to the smaller tribe of Dan.

Verses 3, 4.—LEVI, MANASSEH, AND EPHRAIM.

"It is here repeated for the third time, with regard to the Levites, that they were not included in the number, so as to have the portion of a tribe assigned to them; but it is mentioned for a different purpose, for it is immediately after added that the sons of

Joseph were divided into two tribes, and were thus privileged to obtain a double portion. Thus had Jacob prophesied (Gen. xlix.). or rather, like an arbiter appointed by God, he had in this matter preferred the sons of Joseph to the others. God therefore assumed the Levites to Himself as a peculiar inheritance, and in their stead substituted one of the two families of Joseph."—[*Calvin.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 6—15.

### The Fidelity of Caleb, and its Reward.

Whether Caleb was a native of Israel or a foreign proselyte (cf. Crit. Notes, v. 6), he was reckoned among the tribe of Judah. He was one of the foremost men in the tribe, and while his exaltation may have been greatly owing to his faithfulness as one of the spies sent out by Moses, there must have been a pre-eminence of some kind even to account for his selection on that important occasion. Perhaps he had already shewn some of those traits of the noble character which so conspicuously adorned his after-life. As Caleb belonged to the tribe of Judah, the men of Judah came to support him in his request to Joshua. His privileges and honour would be their honour also. As the representative of Judah in the distribution of the land (cf. Numb. xxxiv. 19), it was the more desirable that Caleb's grant of Hebron should not seem to be in any measure the outcome of his official position. In Caleb's petition and its reception we may notice the following things:—

I. **Earnest piety linked with a remembrance of God's gracious words.** "Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said." These two features are each contributive to the other: the man who is truly pious will love to dwell on the words of the Lord, and the man whose memory cherishes Divine words will find them helpful to his piety. 1. *God both suffers and encourages us to find a stimulus in the thought of personal reward.* For forty-five years Caleb had dwelt with pleasure on "this thing that the Lord said." The name and the thought of Hebron had become part of his very life. He could never forget these gracious words of the Lord. The wilderness could not hide them. The terrible plagues and judgments could not obliterate them. Every one of his companions above the age of twenty, excepting Joshua, had died since this "thing that the Lord had said" was spoken; let what would die, that lived on fresh as ever. And it is not wrong to dwell with joy on the rewards which God promises to us personally. This may not be the highest motive in service, but men are very human, and God's kindness meets them where they are. The noble hymn of Francis Xavier is inspiring in its loftiness, but the key in which it is set is not within the reach of every voice, and probably of no voice at all times. It does us good to hear the holy strain:

> "My God, I love Thee; not because
> I hope for heaven thereby,
> Nor yet because who love Thee not
> Must burn eternally.
> Then why, O blessed Jesu Christ,
> Should I not love Thee well?
> Not for the hope of winning heaven,
> Nor of escaping hell;
> Not with the hope of gaining aught,
> Not seeking a reward;
> But as Thyself hast loved me,
> O ever-loving Lord."

Some have urged that this is the spirit in which we should always serve the Lord. Perhaps we should; but God is kinder than to reject our work when it proceeds from less exalted motives. "He knoweth our frame." He makes us great by

gentleness. The Saviour even urges us to serve in view of the crown which He promises: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." That was a very noble life from which proceeded the utterance, "The love of Christ constraineth me;" but it was the same life which at another time urged men on with the cry—"So run that ye may obtain." Caleb did no wrong to treasure up "the thing that the Lord said" touching Hebron; even so the Saviour has no reproach for us when we find ourselves stimulated to service by the thought of the rewards which await us. So far from reproaching us, when Christ is about to depart from among men, He graciously puts among His last words these: "In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you." That is the picture upon which the absent Saviour would have His apostles steadfastly look. This humanness of the Lord is very beautiful. 2. *The man who is truly pious will equally remember the things which God says touching duties which are to be performed.* Caleb had shewed himself ready to remember commands as well as promises. When he rendered such faithful obedience as one of the spies, his obedience was not merely to Moses, but to God who spake through Moses. He "followed *the Lord* fully." To the memory of a man really pious, a command is as sacred as a promise. There is a sense in which God's commands to serve Him are far more precious than even promises. They tell of complete forgiveness in a way in which it can be told by no assurance of pardon and by no promise of reward. When God condescends to give us something to do for Himself, we may well feel that He has quite blotted out our iniquity. Suppose Jonah had only been *assured* of forgiveness for his sin of fleeing to Tarshish, or that a promise of final salvation had been added to such an assurance. No gracious words in this direction could ever have told of complete pardon as it was told by the mercy which condescended to employ him again. What if another prophet had been sent in Jonah's place? In that case, it seems to us, that Jonah's sense of forgiveness could never have been quite satisfactory. The beauty of pardon is seen, not in any promise, but in the commandment which is written in the history: "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah *the second time*, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." So Peter may have felt a sweet sense of joy as he received that special message to himself to meet the Saviour in Galilee; but Peter's sense of perfect pardon probably came, ultimately, far more through the commandment in which he was again bidden to do the work of his Master. It was in once more feeding Christ's sheep and lambs that the sense of complete forgiveness would have entered into the apostle's life. No mere assurance of pardon could have ever supplied the comfort that must have come through this re-employment. We have only to think of Peter with nothing more to do for Christ, to realize, as far as any one but himself could realize, his utter and life-long misery. He who neglects precepts for promises is not wise. Caleb shews us how to remember both. "In keeping of Thy commandments there is great reward." 3. *The pious man will treasure up, no less, the commendations of the Lord.* These words about "following the Lord fully," or "wholly," had also clung to Caleb (ver. 9). For forty-five years his memory had cherished them as too precious to be forgotten. Those who think that, in uttering on this occasion such words to Joshua, Caleb "talked of his own virtue in rather loftier terms than becomes a pious and modest man," utterly overlook the true aspect of the words. God had said them (Numb. xiv. 24); that was what made them so dear to Caleb. His artless reiteration of them, taken in this light, so far from being immodest, is simple and beautiful. It is the language of the commended child, recounting gratefully from his heart his Father's words of praise. How long will the children above remember the heavenly greeting—"Well done, good and faithful servant"! II. **The consciousness of personal faithfulness associated with trust in precious promises.** Caleb walked before God with a deep concern to honour God. He had "stilled the people" in their rebellion, as far as possible; and

when he could prevail no longer with them, he and Joshua had rent their clothes. He was faithful to the trust which had been reposed in him. 1. *The faithful life has the greatest desire for the things which God promises.* The life of an upright man will have its tastes in harmony with the things which God has to give. 2. *The faithful life best knows the value of God's promises.* The man to whom truth and integrity are dear will know that these are much more sacred to Jehovah. 3. *Thus the faithful life will most fully trust the promises.* They will be deemed worth remembering not only for forty-five years, but throughout all the years in which such a life is spared. "The thing which the Lord hath said" will seem to be "ordered in all things, and sure." It will be regarded as sure in days of adversity, no less than in days of prosperity and victory. III. **Godly manliness going with unselfishness and dependence.** Caleb's words have in them a frankness and outspokenness which make them attractive. He did not affect to hide the sin of his brethren; on the other hand, he called it by no harsh name. Here is none of the simpering of a false modesty, neither is there anything of the spirit of fault-finding. And as his words touching his brethren, so are his words concerning himself. He frankly said that he "wholly followed the Lord God" (ver. 8). The words are too brief and too matter-of-fact for egotism. A vain man would have made a sermon of what Caleb put into a sentence. Caleb felt that he had honestly sought God's glory and Israel's good on the occasion in question, and with a manly freedom from affectation he did not attempt to conceal that. We love him both for that which he said and for that which he did not say. We feel, as we read, that we are reading the speech of a man. The language of Caleb is further relieved from any appearance of a vain and weak egotism, if we remember that he was merely reiterating "the thing that the Lord said." These words about following the Lord wholly are not Caleb's words at all, but the words of Jehovah, which had been so thankfully cherished for so long a time. It might have seemed vain to utter thus merely his own judgment; it was but a grateful love to God, and a manly consciousness that this thing was true, which led Caleb thus to repeat the words of God. Over against all this strong and transparent manliness, it is very beautiful to observe Caleb's unselfishness and childlike dependence. These giant Anakim he was perfectly willing to confront. He did not want a lot where there were no foes. Let others seek such an inheritance if they chose; this was a brave man, and he could fight; this was an unselfish man, and while his brethren fought with men, he, although eighty-five years of age, would fight with giants. So manly was this aged Caleb, and so unselfish. And yet this brave and strong man felt as dependent on his God as a little child on its father. He said: "If so be the Lord will be with me, then shall I be able to drive them out, as the Lord said." Manly piety is great in its freedom from paltry affectation, great in its unselfishness, but greatest of all in its dependence upon God. Paul said: "When I am weak, then am I strong;" the converse is no less true—when we are strong, then we are weak. It is manhood in its noblest form that leans hardest upon God; and he who leans very much upon God is usually strong in a manhood altogether in advance of the manliness of him who is self-reliant. IV. **Gratitude connected with fidelity and trust** (verses 10, 11). This man, who had been so strong to follow God, and who was so hale at the age of fourscore and five years, thankfully acknowledged that his vigour had been all of Jehovah. The Lord had kept him alive. His brethren had died in the wilderness; it was of the Lord that he had not died. His brethren had died for sin; Caleb seemed to recognise that it was of the Lord also that he had not sinned as they had done. True greatness and warm gratitude generally go together. It was the "great apostle of the Gentiles" who said so ardently, "By the grace of God I am what I am." V. **A sense of personal fitness united with hope.** Caleb's trust was wholly in the Lord, and yet he well knew that the Lord's way was to work naturally. It needed a strong man to encounter such foes as these Anakim, and Caleb felt that he was strong, and

hoped accordingly. However much faith may rely upon God as the only efficient worker, godly wisdom ever recognises this need of being in harmony with God's methods. Had Caleb been infirm and feeble, probably not even his faith would have dared to hope for victory over these descendants of giants. While God must be "all in all," there must also be a consciousness that we are what God can bless. It is thus that a man living in sin cannot dare to hope for salvation. The conscience knows better than to allow that God's method is to save a man who is deliberately opposing such salvation. There is an unfitness of things which smothers hope at the birth. VI. **Personal worth crowned with permanent rewards.** 1. *Men reward personal worth.* "Joshua blessed him." Sooner or later, true merit is acknowledged everywhere. 2. *God rewards personal worth.* As among men, God recognises and honours fidelity and obedience. The Bible is full of such instances. 3. *The great reward of the soul's salvation is ever and only because of the merits of Christ.* "My goodness extendeth not to Thee," said the Psalmist. Our best deeds have much of impurity. In this matter we can rely only on Him "who did no sin."

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 6, 7. THE PLEASANT MEMORIES OF THE MAN WHO HAS BEEN FAITHFUL TO HIS GOD.

I. **To remember the past is the lot of every man, irrespective of the man's personal character.** From the narrow margin of the time which is present, every man has two broad views which are continually inviting his contemplation. The one lies stretched out before him, the other behind him; one deals with the future, the other with the past. The view before us is made up to a very small extent by penetration based on experience. For the irreligious man it is composed very much more by desire, fancy, and imagination; while for the man who believes in the word of God it is wrought principally by faith. The view behind us is, for the most part, dim and obscure; but here and there, in every life that has reached maturity, there stand up in the distance behind it, clear and well defined as the rugged outline of the mountain, which, though past long since, shews no sign of vanishing, memories which are never forgotten.

**And these memories of past life are independent of character. They are involuntary: they come whether men will or will not.** Not only does faithful Caleb dwell upon the past, but the unfaithful man must think upon it also.

II. **The remembrances of the righteous, while often supplying reasons for shame, afford, nevertheless, occasions for thankfulness and joy.** A poet has written to us of "The Pleasures of Hope;" to the man who has been faithful to his God, there come no less powerfully the pleasures of memory. Not only *all things*, but *all time* "works together for good" to the man who loves God. Time to come is made bright with hope of grace yet to be given, and time past is illuminated with the light of victories won through mercy already bestowed. How thankfully would Joseph and Daniel and the three Hebrew youths each look back to the place of temptation where God had helped them to come off "more than conquerors." 1. *The remembrances of the righteous are some sorrowful and some gladdening.* Caleb had this great triumph in which he had "wholly followed the Lord;" doubtless he had also to think upon many defeats which had to be contemplated with shame. It is thus with the best of men: they have here and there a victory of which to sing, and many failures and overthrows which they are compelled to mourn. 2. *The remembrances of the righteous which are encouraging ever stand connected with the name and grace of God.* "The Lord sent me" (ver. 7). Thus, too, in the next verse, Caleb intimates that the Lord had gone before him, and that he had but "followed" where Jehovah Himself had led. 3. *The helpful remembrances of the righteous are made still happier by fraternal fellowship with*

*others who have also been faithful.* It did not detract from Caleb's joy to remember that Joshua had been faithful too, and that he had also been commended by God. It added to the pleasure of this good man to be able to say, "Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said unto Moses the man of God concerning me *and thee.*" The joy of the pious man is not solitary and selfish. The angels sing together. The godly "rejoice with them that do rejoice." 4. *These happier remembrances of the righteous always stand well in accord with a good conscience.* "I brought him word again, *as it was in mine heart.*" When Caleb came back to Moses, he spoke in integrity, and as he felt that he ought to speak. The shout of victory ever goes with the voice of God, and the voice of God goes no less with the teaching of conscience. True, men sometimes sin in ignorance and in unbelief, but, even then, darkness may be only the consequence of a previous abuse of light. He who always follows God with a good conscience, as the word of God is in his heart, will not often stray. 5. *The remembrances of the righteous man sometimes contradict intervening seasons of depression.* There may have been times when Caleb doubted if he should ever enter upon the promised inheritance. Job was accused of saying, "It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God." To not a few of the godly Jews of Old Testament times, as the Psalms repeatedly bear witness, it seemed a standing problem of difficulty that the ungodly should flourish, while the righteous should be driven to say, "Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain." Elijah thought that he had served God almost fruitlessly, and that he only was left of those who had not bowed the knee to Baal. It may be that since his fidelity at Kadesh-barnea, some such moments of depression as these had come upon Caleb. If so, how completely would they have stood contradicted now, as he was about to enter upon his long-promised possession. There are hours and days with most of us when our faithful service seems a thing of nought. We are like children upon the sands at the sea-side, building here "a castle" and there "a fort," which the next tide washes out altogether; so the tides of time wash over our feeble work for men and for God, and seem to obliterate the very marks of our building. We are driven to think our labour as having been "in vain," and as having no more endurance than the house built upon the sand. But he who works for God, builds on a rock which cannot be shaken. To every faithful heart the day will come when happy memories will contradict entirely the depression sometimes suffered in seasons of adversity.

**III. The remembrances of the ungodly will presently serve to make the retrospect of time as saddening as the prospect of eternity.** In the pious man, both time and eternity will serve to provoke gladness, while to the wicked, neither the one nor the other can bring any heritage but pain. To such, the past must ever be full of shame and anguish, and the future dark with fear and despair.

Verse 8. "CALEB THE MAN FOR THE TIMES."

It is a rough name that—"Caleb." Most translators say it signifies "*a dog.*" But what mattereth a man's name? Possibly the man himself was somewhat rough: many of the heartiest of men are so. As the unpolished oyster yet beareth within itself the priceless pearl, so ofttimes ruggedness of exterior covereth worth. A dog, moreover, is not all badness, though "*without* are dogs and sorcerers." It hath this virtue, that it followeth its master; and therein this Caleb was well named; for never dog so followed his master as Caleb followed his God. . . . The name, however, has another signification, and we like it rather better; it means "all heart." Here was a fitting surname for the man whose whole heart followed his God. He says of himself that he brought a report of the land according to all that was in his heart.

**I. Caleb's faithful following of his God.** He never went before his God. That is presumption. The highest point to which the true believer ever comes is to walk with God, but never to walk

before Him. Caleb followed the Lord; many others do the same, but then they could not win that adverb which is Caleb's golden medal. He followed the Lord "fully," says one text; "wholly," says another. Some of us follow the Lord, but it is a great way off, like Peter, or now and then, as did Saul the king. In explaining this word "wholly," I shall follow the explanation of good Matthew Henry. 1. *Caleb followed the Lord universally, without dividing.* Whatever his Master told him to do, he did. 2. *Caleb followed the Lord fully, that is, sincerely, without dissembling.* He was no hypocrite: he followed the Lord with his whole heart. 3. *Caleb followed the Lord wholly, that is, cheerfully, without disputing.* Those who serve God with a sad countenance, because they do that which is unpleasant to them, are not His servants at all. 4. *Caleb followed the Lord constantly, without declining.* He persevered during the forty days of his spyship, and brought back a true report. Forty-five years he lived in the camp of Israel, but all that time he followed the Lord, and never once consorted with murmuring rebels; and when his time came to claim his heritage, at the age of eighty-five, the good old man was following the Lord fully.

**II. Caleb's favoured portion.** *His life was preserved in the hour of judgment.* The ten fell, smitten with the plague, but Caleb lived. There be many who seek their life that lose it; and there be some who lose it for Christ's sake, that find it to life eternal. *Caleb was also comforted with a long life of vigour.* At eighty-five he was as strong as at forty, and still able to face the giants. *Caleb received as his reward great honour among his brethren.* He was at least twenty years older than any other man in the camp, except Joshua. *Caleb had the distinguished reward of being put upon the hardest service.* That is always the lot of the most faithful servant of God. *Caleb had the honour of enjoying what he had once seen.* He had only seen the land when he said, "We are able to take it." He lived not only to take it, but to enjoy it for himself. *Caleb left a blessing to his children.* He had many sons, but he fought for them, and carved out a portion for them all. If there is any man who shall be able to leave his children the blessing of the upper and nether springs, it is the man who follows the Lord fully. If I might envy any man, it would be the believer who from his youth up has walked, through Divine grace, according to his Lord's commandments, and who is able, when his day comes, to scatter benedictions upon his rising sons and daughters, and leave them with godliness, which hath the blessing of this life and that which is to come.

**III. Caleb's secret character.** The Lord said of him, "Because he hath another spirit with him." He had another spirit—not only a bold, generous, courageous, noble, and heroic spirit, but the spirit and influence of God, which thus raised him above human inquietudes and earthly fears. Therefore he followed the Lord fully. . . . The real way to make a new life is to receive a new spirit. There must be given us, if we would follow the Lord fully, a new heart, and that new heart must be found at the foot of the cross, where the Holy Spirit works through the bleeding wounds of Jesus. We need *the spirit of faith;* that spirit which takes God at His word, reads His promise, and knows it to be true. Then a faithful spirit always begets *a meek spirit*, and a meek spirit always begets *a brave spirit.* It is said of the wood of the elder tree, that none is softer, but yet it is recorded of old that Venice was built upon piles of the elder tree, because it will never rot; and so the meek-spirited man, who is gentle and patient, lasts on bravely, holding his own against all the attacks of the destroying adversary. The true believer has also *a loving spirit*, as the result of Jesus' grace. He has next *a zealous spirit*, and so he spends and is spent for God; and this begets in him *a heavenly spirit*, and so he tries to live in heaven, and make earth a heaven to his fellow-men, believing that he shall soon have a heaven for himself and for them too on the other side of the stream. Oh that the Holy Spirit would lead us to go to Jesus just as we are, and look up to Him and beseech

Him to fulfil that great covenant promise: "A new heart also will I give them, a right spirit will I put within them." [*Met. Tab. Pulpit.*]

Verse 9.—"THE PROMISE IS UNTO YOU AND TO YOUR CHILDREN."

**I. The inheritance those who follow God is the inheritance of promise.**

**II. The inheritance is promised to the man who is faithful, and yet is always by the grace of God.**

**III. The inheritance is not merely to the faithful follower, but to his children also.**

**IV. The inheritance, although it may be announced by His servants, is promised by Jehovah Himself, and is thus certain, however long it may be deferred.**

Verses 10—12.—GRACIOUS KEEPING GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED.

**I. They who live, live by the keeping of God.** "None can keep alive his own soul." "He holdeth our soul in life." Caleb had been preserved under circumstances common to men in general, and under such as were unusual. 1. *He was kept alive, notwithstanding natural liability to decay and death.* His physical strength may have been above the average; that strength was the gift of God. He was probably a man whose life owed much to discipline and regular habits; this disposition to a healthy mode of life had been cultivated by his godliness. 2. *Caleb had been kept alive through the dangers of the desert and of the war.* The danger of famine God had met by the manna and the quails. When thirst threatened to destroy, the Lord had given streams from the rocks. In the various conflicts in the wilderness, Jehovah had shielded this brave soldier, so that "not a single shaft could hit;" and in the battles in the land of Canaan itself, mighty miracles had constantly testified to the care and keeping of God. 3. *Caleb had been kept alive when all saving Joshua and himself had died.* Every other member of the host who was over the age of twenty at the time when Moses sent out the spies, had passed away in the wilderness. Each of these had died, according to the word of Jehovah. Well might Caleb say, "The Lord hath kept me alive."

**II. They who are kept by God are kept of God's purpose, and well kept.**

1. *God does not keep men alive thoughtlessly and in unconcern.* "The Lord hath kept me alive, *as He said.*" He purposes to preserve. Every living sparrow represents something which He has not yet suffered to "fall on the ground," and which He has not "forgotten." Every hair of every living head is something which He has "numbered," and which still has its place in the count of God. But of those whom He protects as fearing and loving Him, it stands specially recorded, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye." Thus, too, it had been already said of Caleb as one of the host of Israel (Deut. xxxii. 10). 2. *Those whom God keeps are kept perfectly.* The wilderness not only fails to consume; it does not even weaken. Many years are equally impotent to work harm. "As I was in the day that Moses sent me," etc. The dangers of the battle-field had also failed to reach him who was borne in the arms which had made him (cf. Isa. xlvi. 4). God had carried His servant even to old age, and nothing had impaired his strength.

**III. They who are thus kept by God should reiterate it to the praise of God.** "Behold, the Lord hath kept," etc. Caleb was a monument reared and sustained by the hand of God, and in all that he was at that day, he wished men to read the Divine name and Divine mercy. 1. *Caleb illustrates the beauty of gratitude.* It is pleasant and comely to see this good man tracing the streams of life, health, and strength to their source. 2. *Caleb reminds us of the frequency of ingratitude.* It is to be feared that this spirit of thanksgiving is rather exceptional than common. True, there are many hearts which ascribe praise unto God for all which they have received, but what are these among the multitudes who render no thanksgiving whatever? After all, there is only here and there a star in the heavens reflecting back the light given of God;

the firmament is mostly made up of clouds and darkness and night.

**IV. They who have been long kept by God may well undertake great works in the name of God** (verse 12). Gratitude is little without trust. He who thanks sincerely for the past will trust reverently and unquestioningly for the future. 1. *Faith has no hesitation because of the magnitude of work which is to be done in the name of God.* Giants and walled cities need make no difference to the man who hopes that the Lord will be with him. 2. *Faith is as confident in the immediate prospect of such work as in the distant prospect.* Compare Caleb's language in Numb. xiii. 30, xiv. 6—9, with the spirit manifested now that the task seemed directly before him. The language of true faith is not merely words; the whole history of the Church of God is thick with the names of men who have also been bold to act.

Verses 10—14.—Laus Deo.

**I. Many years of keeping by God, and ardent words of praise to God.**

**II. Ardent words of praise for the past, and great confidence in view of the difficult future.**

**III. Great confidence in God for the future, and the future works of faith fully equal to the present words of faith.** (Compare verse 12 with chap. xv. 14; Judges i. 9—20.)

**IV. Confident faith in God, and gracious rewards from God** (verses 13, 14. 1. The recognition of Caleb's piety by Joshua. 2. The possession of Hebron.

Verse 12.—Desiring and Possessing.

**I. He who seeks should feel able to possess, and strong to occupy.** Many covet lots in life which they can never take, which if they took they would be unable to hold, and which if they succeeded in holding they would never occupy usefully.

**II. Ability to possess and occupy is not in itself a sufficient testimony that such occupation would be right.** There are many who find their title only in their own power. With them, "right" and "might" are synonymous. They take, as Wordsworth says,

"For why? Because the good old rule
Sufficeth them; the simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can."

Caleb pleads his ability to occupy, but finds, nevertheless, a far higher title than this ere he seeks to do so.

**III. He cannot be wrong in his seeking, who is guided by God, nor fail in possessing when he depends upon God.** Caleb found his true title to Hebron in the fact that "the Lord spake of it in that day" as his. He found his power to conquer the Anakim in the assurance that the Lord would be with him. He who is thus guided, and thus helped, may well look to come into and occupy wisely a right and good inheritance.

The Origin of the Promise to Caleb.

Probably the fears of the ten spies were occasioned more by what they saw at Hebron, than by anything which they witnessed elsewhere in Canaan. In Numb. xiii. 22, we are told that they came unto Hebron, and a few verses farther on in the same chapter we have the record of their murmuring, in which, as the burden of their complaint, they are seen crying out about the walled cities and the Anakim. As Hebron is specially mentioned as the abode of the Anakim, the conjecture of Matthew Henry is not unnatural. He says: "We may suppose that Caleb, observing what stress they laid upon the difficulty of conquering Hebron, a city garrisoned by the giants, and how from thence they inferred that the conquest of the whole land was utterly impracticable; in opposition to their suggestions, and to convince the people that he spake as he thought, he bravely desired to have that city, which they called invincible, assigned to himself for his own portion: 'I will undertake to deal with that; and if I cannot get it for my inheritance, I will be without it.' 'Well,' saith Moses, 'it shall be thine own then; win and wear it.'"

If the promise of Moses was elicited under some such circumstances as these, we may reasonably suppose that the oath of Moses was confirmed by Jehovah in the conversation which fol-

lowed, and which is partly recorded in Numb. xiv. The allusion to Caleb in verse 24 of that chapter might well be the occasion when the thing which "Moses sware" became also "the thing that the Lord said."

THE APPROACH TO HEBRON FROM ENGEDI.

"With Ziph the more desolate region ended. The valleys now began, at least in our eyes, almost literally to laugh and sing. Greener and greener did they grow—the shrubs, too, shot up above that stunted growth. At last, on the summits of further hills, lines of spreading trees appeared against the sky. Then came ploughed fields and oxen. Lastly, a deep and wide recess opened in the hills—towers and minarets appeared through the gap, which gradually unfolded into the city of 'the Friend of God'—this is its Arabic name (El Khalîl): far up on the right ran a wide and beautiful upland valley, all partitioned into gardens and fields, green fig-trees, and cherry-trees, and the vineyards—famous through all ages; and far off, grey and beautiful as those of Tivoli, swept down the western slope the olive groves of Hebron. Most startling of all was the hum through the air—hitherto 'that silent air' which I described during our first encampment, but which had grown familiar as the sounds of London to those who live constantly within their range—the hum, at first, of isolated human voices and the lowing of the cattle, rising up from these various orchards and cornfields, and then a sound, which, to our ears, seemed like that of a mighty multitude, but which was only the united murmur of the population of the little town, which we now entered at its southern end. They had come out to look at some troops which were going off to capture a refractory chief. . . . High above us on the eastern height of the town—which lies nestled, Italian-like, on the slope of a ravine—rose the long black walls and two stately minarets of that illustrious mosque, one of the four sanctuaries of the Mahometan world, sacred in the eyes of all the world besides, which covers the Cave of Machpelah, the last resting-place of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We passed on by one of those two ancient reservoirs, where King David hanged the murderers of his rival (2 Sam. iv. 12), up a slope of green grass, broken only by tombs and flocks of sheep, to the high gates of the Quarantine, which closed upon us, and where we are now imprisoned for the next three days, but with that glorious view of Hebron before us day and night." [*Stanley's Sinai and Palestine.*]

## CHAPTER XV.

### *THE INHERITANCE OF JUDAH.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1.** This verse states the position of the lot of Judah in relation to the whole of Canaan; it was in the extreme south of the land. In verses 2—4 we have given the particulars of the southern border of the southern lot. **2. Their south border]** Compare Numb. xxxiv. 3—5. **The bay that looketh southward]** *Marg.*="the tongue." "This tongue is the southernmost portion of the Dead Sea, reaching from the peninsula, which runs out a great distance into the sea on the west of Kerek (Robinson ii. 216, sqq.), to the south point of the sea by the so-called Salt-hill and Salt-marsh. At this point the boundary of Judah commenced." [*Keil.*] **3. To Maaleh-Acrabbim]** *Lit.*, "The acclivity of scorpions;" *marg.*, "The going up to Acrabbim." Robinson concluded that the range of cliffs, a few miles south of the Dead Sea, was the place indicated. The remaining places named in this verse are unknown, though Hezron is mentioned in verse 25, as being the same as Hazor. **4. Azmon]** Unknown: the name occurs also in Numb. xxxiv. 4, 5. **The "river" or "torrent of Egypt"** is thought to be the Wady el Arish. **At the Sea]** The Mediterranean Sea; the southern border thus extending from the "tongue" of the Dead Sea to the Wady el Arish, on the coast of the Mediterranean. Robinson says that ruins of cities are still to be found as far south as is indicated by this line of boundary, in what was subsequently known as part of the desert. **5. The Salt Sea, unto the end of Jordan]** That is, the eastern boundary extended from the southernmost point of the Dead Sea, to the mouth of the Jordan. **Their border in the north]** This was from near the mouth of the Jordan, on the north-east, to Jabneel, not far from the coast of the Mediterranean, and thence to the sea itself. The particulars of this boundary line extend to the close of verse 11, and are given with more fulness of detail than those of even the southern boundary. This was the more necessary on account of adjoining tribes on this border. **6. Up to Beth-Hogla]** Discovered by Robinson, near to Gilgal, about two miles westward from the Jordan, and about four miles north of the Dead Sea. It is now called *Ain Hadjla.* Though a frontier town, it belonged to the lot of Benjamin (chap. xviii. 19, 21). **By the north of Beth-Arabah]** By this it would seem that this place was at first allotted to Judah. This, in verse 61, is said to have been the case. Yet, in chap. xviii. **22,** we learn that it was subsequently given to the tribe of Benjamin. **The stone of Bohan]** Thought to have stood upon the side of the mountains. It was so called after a Reubenite, who possibly may have distinguished himself in some manner in this neighbourhood soon aft-

the crossing of the Jordan. 7. **Debir**] There were two other places of this name; **Debir**, near Hebron, also called Kirjath-Sepher, and a Debir on the east of Jordan, near Mahanaim (chap. xiii. 26). **Gilgal that is before the going up to Adummim**] "The valley of Achor must be the *Wady Kelt*. Up that wady the line ran toward Debir (somewhere near the Khan Hudrur, near which is *Wady Dabor*). Then it turned northward to Gilgal ('Geliloth' in chap. xviii. 17), which is opposite the going up to Adummim. This latter place is identified with Kalaat ed-Dem on the north of the Jerusalem and Jericho road, where the soil is red. Adummim signifies red. This Gilgal (or Geliloth), therefore, is a place near this spot, and not the Gilgal where Israel encamped down in the Arabah or Ghor." [*Crosby.*] With this also agrees Keil, but Von Raumer, Fay, and others, think the Gilgal to be the place of the first encampment. The river, or "torrent," is, of course, not the Jordan, but the Wady Kelt, or, as in chap. xvi. 1, "the water of Jericho." **En-Shemesh**]="The spring," or "fountain, of the sun;" below Bethany, on the road to Jericho. **En-Rogel**] Cf. chap. xviii. 16; 2 Sam. xvii. 17; 1 Kings i. 9. "In more modern times, a tradition, apparently first recorded by Brocardus, would make En-Rogel the well of Job or Nehemiah (Bir Eyub), below the junction of the valleys of Kedron and Hinnom, and south of the pool of Siloam. Against this general belief some strong arguments are urged by Dr. Bonar, in favour of identifying En-Rogel with the 'fountain of the Virgin,' *'Ain Umm ed-Daraj*—the perennial source from which the pool of Siloam is supplied." [*Smith's Bib. Dic.*]. 8. **The valley of the son of Hinnom**] This is the first mention in Scripture of the valley which afterwards became so notorious as the scene of a most revolting form of idolatry (cf. 2 Chron. xxviii. 3, xxxiii. 6, *etc.*), and which came to be known as a symbol of hell. **Valley of the Giants**] *Lit.*="of the Rephaim." This valley lies on the south-west of Jerusalem. 9. **The water of Nephtoah**] Now *Liftah*. "Liftah numbers its fighting men by hundreds, and provides Jerusalem, among other things, with water from its copious fountains." [*Valentiner.*] **Mount Ephron**] Only mentioned here. Thought to be the high ridge between Liftah and *Kuryet el-Enab*, the modern name of Baalah, or Kirjath-jearim, next mentioned. This latter place was one of the cities formerly belonging to Gibeon (chap. ix. 17). 10. **Mount Seir . . . Mount Jearim, *etc.*** "Mount Seir is the high ridge on which is *Saris*. Mount Jearim, or Chesalon (on Mount Jearim), is now *Kesla*, on the lofty summit between *Wady Ghurah* and *Wady Ismain*. Beth-Shemesh is now *Ain Shems*. Timnath, conspicuous in Samson's history, is *Tibneh*, where one looks out on the Philistine plain." [*Crosby.*] 11. **Ekron**] Cf. on chap. xiii. 3. Nothing is known of Shicron. **Mount Baalah**] A short ridge of hills on the west of Ekron, noticed by Robinson. **Jabneel**] Elsewhere=Jabneh (2 Chron. xxvi. 6), and frequently alluded to in Maccabees. Robinson supposed that from Jabneel the boundary proceeded in a direct line to the sea, others think that it may have followed the course of the adjacent valley. 12. **The west border**] This, like the opposite boundary on the east, being formed throughout by sea-coast, is thus briefly indicated. 13—16. **And unto Caleb, *etc.***] Cf. on chap. xiv. 6—15. Compare, also, Judges i. 10—20. Keil contends that neither of these passages is copied from the other, but that both were compiled from a common document of an earlier date. 17. **Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb**] "The Masorites, by their pointing (both here and in Judges i. 13, iii. 9), make Othniel the brother of Caleb. This would make Achsah marry her uncle, which Keil asserts was not forbidden in the law. It seems, however, to be against the spirit of Lev. xviii. 14. Moreover, it is unlikely that Caleb would have a brother so young as to be a judge of Israel for forty years after Joshua's death (Judges iii. 11). I prefer, therefore, to take the word 'brother' to refer to Kenaz, the younger brother of Caleb, whose son was Othniel. Kenaz would be a family name repeated in Othniel's father." [*Crosby.*] 20. **This is the inheritance**] Keil and Fay make this verse to be the concluding formula to the first division of the chapter, but it seems more natural to read it as introductory to the catalogue of cities which follows. 21—32. **The cities of the Negeb, or south**] Thirty-six names are given, and in verse 32 the number of the cities is said to be twenty-nine. It has been contended by some, that several of the names are double; by others, that additional names are added to the list by some later writer, who omitted altering the number given as the total; while others have sought to reconcile the discrepancy by suggestions still more remote and unlikely. In the utter absence of positive evidence of alteration by any later writer, the tendency of the German critics to imagine an additional author cannot but be regretted. Such a view ought to be more than a speculation. Till reasons be given for some other course, the opinion that the number "twenty-nine" is a transcriber's error is as good as any other, while it is less cumbrous, and thus more natural. 21—23. **Kabzeel . . . Dimonah**] Kabzeel may be the Jekabzeel of Neh. xi. 25; cf., also, 2 Sam. xxiii. 2. Dimonah is thought to be the same as Dibon of Neh. xi. 25. Of the remaining cities of this group, nothing is known. 24, 25. **Ziph, and Telem, and Bealoth**] These are unknown. Hazor-Hadattah="New Hazor." Kerioth-Hezron is also to be read as a compound name. The sites are not known. 26—28. **Amam, *etc.***] **Amam is unknown.** Shema, said by Capellus and Reland to be the Sheba of chap. xix. 2, where it is again mentioned with Moladah. Moladah was afterwards assigned to Simeon (cf., also, Neh. xi. 26). It is thought to be the modern *el-Milh*, about four miles from *Tel Arad*, and nine east of Beersheba. The places named in verse 27 are unknown. The same remark applies to Hazar-Shual, and Bizjothjah. Beer-sheba="*well of seven*," or "*well of the oath*," referring to the oath of Abraham on setting apart the seven lambs for Abimelech (Gen. xxi. 28—32. Compare, also, Gen. xxvi. 26—33). The modern name is *Bir es-Seba*. 29—32.

**Baalah, Iim, *etc.*]** Little, or nothing, is known of the first five places named in this group Baalah, however, must be distinguished from Kirjath-jearim as named in verses 9 and 10 of this chapter. Hormah; cf. on chap. xii. 14. Ziklag became famous as the residence of David, to whom it was given by Achish. Notwithstanding so many notices of this place, the site is uncertain. With the exception of being mentioned elsewhere, and perhaps in some cases under other names, these remaining cities of the south are unknown. **33—47. The cities of the Shephelah, or lowlands]** Several of these have been noticed under other chapters, and others which are unknown may be passed over. As several cities in the Negeb were afterwards allotted to Simeon (chap. xix. 1—9), so some in this district were subsequently assigned to Dan (chap. xix. 40—48). **33. Eshtaol and Zoreah]** Generally mentioned together. Memorable in connection with the life of Samson, and as the burial-place on himself and his father. By a comparison of chaps. xiii. 25, xviii. 12, both places were evidently near to each other and to Kirjath-jearim. **34. Zanoah]** Robinson places it on the eastern side of the ruins of Zoreah, identifying it with the modern Zannah. **35. Jarmuth, *etc.*]** Cf. on chaps. x. 3, 10, xii. 15. **Socoh]** Identified by Robinson in *Shuweikeh*. Near to Azekah (1 Sam. xvii. 1), fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 7), and taken by the Philistines in the time of Ahaz. There was another place of this name in the mountains, which is also called *Shuweikeh* (cf. ver. 48). **36. Gederah and Gederothaim]** *Marg.*="or" Gederothaim. The LXX. omit the latter name, with whom agree Winer and Knobel, thus making the number of cities in this group to be "fourteen." **37. Zenan]** Thought to be the Zaanan of Micah i. 11. **38. Mizpeh]** There were several places bearing this descriptive name (cf. on chap. xi. 3). **39. Lachish . . . Eglon]** Cf. on chap. x. 3. "Bozkath, the birth-place of the mother of Josiah (2 Kings xxii. 1), stood somewhere near to these two cities." [*Keil.*] **42. Makkedah]** Cf. on chap. x. 10. **43. Nezib]** Thought by Robinson to be *Beit Nusib*, in the *Wady Sur*. **44. Keilah, *etc.*]** Famous in the life of David (1 Sam. xxiii.); mentioned also in Neh. iii. 17, 18. "Achzib, mentioned here and Micah i. 14, was probably identical with Chezib, Gen. xxxviii. 5 . . . Mareshah was fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron. xi. 8; cf., also, Micah i. 15; 2 Chron. xiv. 9, xx. 37), and is frequently mentioned in later times." [*Keil.*] **45—47. Ekron, *etc.*]** Cf. under chaps. xiii. 3, xi. 22. **48—60. The cities in the mountains]** Many of these also are either little known, or have not been identified. **48. Jattir]** Now *'Attir*, about ten miles south of Hebron. Afterwards given to the priests (chap. xxi. 13). It was one of the cities to whose elders David made presents, when he resided in Ziklag (1 Sam. xxx. 27). **49. Kirjath-Sannah]** Cf. on chaps. x. 38, xv. 7. **50. Anab, *etc.*]** A former abode of the Anakim. Robinson speaks of it as still retaining its name, and as among the hills near to Shoco and Eshtemoah, about ten miles S.S.W. of Hebron. **52—54. Arab, and Dumah, *etc.*]** These cities, forming the second group of this division, were all to the north of those named in the four verses preceding. Aphekah, it is thought by some, is not the same as the Aphek of chap. xii. 18, on which see note. **55—57. Maon, Carmel, *etc.*]** Maon=*Main*, on a conical hill, about seven miles S.S.E. of Hebron. Cf., for associations, 1 Sam. xxiii. 24, 25; xxv. 2. Carmel (now *Kurmul*), close to Maon, on the north. Cf. 1 Sam. xv. 12, xxvii. 3. This must have been the place made famous by Uzziah's husbandry and vines (2 Chron. xxvi. 10). Ziph is now *Tel Zif*. It was famous as a refuge of David (1 Sam. xxiii. 14, 15, xxvi. 2). Juttah, which still bears its ancient name, is between Ziph and Carmel. Jezreel only occurs again in 1 Sam. xxv. 43. Of the remaining cities of this group, little or nothing is known. **58, 59. Halhul, Bethzur, *etc.*]** These six cities were still more to the north. The three mentioned first, retain their former names. Following verse 59, a group of eleven cities is given by the LXX., which, it is supposed, have been accidentally omitted from the Hebrew text. **61, 62. The cities in the wilderness]** By "the wilderness" is meant "the eastern slope of the mountain region, which is bare and rugged to the Dead Sea, and including so much of the Jordan plain as appertained to Judah. It was all a barren region, except in small oases by fountains." [*Crosby.*] **61. Beth-Arabah]** Cf. verse 6. The three places which follow are not mentioned elsewhere, and are unknown. **62. The City of Salt]** Robinson concluded that this stood in the Salt Valley at the southern end of the Dead Sea. **Engedi]** =Goat-fountain; now *Aim Jidy*, originally Hazazon-Tamar (Gen. xiv. 7; 2 Chron. xx. 2), so called, Josephus thought, on account of its palm groves. Its neighbourhood is celebrated as a refuge of David (1 Sam. xxiv. 1—3), and as remarkable for its vineyards (Cant. i. 14). **63. The children of Judah at Jerusalem]** For remarks on this, as indicating the time at which the book of Joshua was written, see below.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE PARAGRAPHS.*

### Verses 1—12.—The General Position of the Tribe of Judah in the Land.

"It is to be observed that the lot of the tribe of Judah not only falls on elevated ground, the very elevation of the territory indicating the dignity of the future kingdom, but a similar presage is given by its being the first lot that turns up. Judah is preferred to all others. Who does not see that it is raised to the highest

rank, in order that the prophecy of Jacob may be fulfilled? Then, within the limits here laid down, it is well known that there were rich pastures, and vineyards celebrated for their productiveness and the excellence of their wines. In this way, while the lot corresponds with the prophecy of Jacob, it is perfectly clear that it did not so happen by chance; the holy patriarch had only uttered what was dictated by the Spirit." [*Calvin.*]

Verses 13, 14.—Divine Promises in relation to Human Effort and Human Steadfastness.

These verses, with the four that follow, were probably inserted by the author of this book to give unity and completeness to the narrative respecting Caleb. As we learn by Judges i. 1—16, the taking of Hebron was not till "after the death of Joshua." In order that it might be seen that Caleb's valour was no mere boast, and that the promise of Jehovah was sure to the man who trusted it, the fall of the city is related here.

I. God's promises are given to the man who has a heart to use them. The "thing that the Lord said unto Moses" (chap. xiv. 6) is here said to have become also "the commandment of the Lord to Joshua." No such promise was given to the ten spies. It was to the man who believed that the walled city and the giant garrison were as nothing before the word of Jehovah, that the word of Jehovah came. The promises are always in the Scriptures; no man ever makes one of them *his* promise, who does not read with faith.

II. God's promises are not given to promote our rest, but to provoke us to conflict. They are not to supersede our efforts, but to shew us the necessity of effort. They are not spoken to induce slothfulness, but to stir us to action. Joshua seems to have lived for about seventeen years after the time of conceding Caleb's request, as narrated in the previous chapter. We must not suppose that during this time Caleb was idle, or that he feared the encounter to which he stood pledged. His whole life forbids that. It is rather to be concluded that with his usual magnanimity he gave his continued services to assist Joshua in bringing others into their inheritance before he sternly set himself to seek an entrance into his own.

III. God's usual way in His promises is not to make our difficulties less, but our strength more. When Caleb advanced to Hebron, the Anakim were still there. Men cry to the Lord, "Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies," and that prayer, doubtless, has been often answered. But the method of the Lord is usually not to diminish enemies, but to increase faith and strength. He replies: "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be;" and not, "As thy strength is, so shall thy day be." To the great man who wanted less of the thorn and more of peace, the Divine voice merely answered, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Hence the Bible is not a continued panorama of green pastures and still waters, but often shews stern battle-fields and glorious victories.

IV. God's promises are worthy of our trust, not only in the day of peace but in the time of actual conflict. Caleb had said the thing which was *in his heart* when he made his report to Moses, and exclaimed of Canaan, "We are well able to overcome it;" forty-five years later, when he made his request to Joshua, his faith was still firm (chap. xiv. 12); but no less did this good man believe in his God in the day when he led his brethren to attack the fastness of Hebron, and slew the sons of Anak. God's promises are not merely something to make the day of peace more peaceful, but stars, which no cloud of unbelief should be suffered to hide, intended to shine out upon us and guide us to victory in the otherwise dark night of actual conflict. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." In view of that stern foe, while it is somewhere in the distance, God's promise brings peace; the noble host of the believing dead bear witness, with no conspicuous exception, that "the things which the Lord hath said" are equally sufficient when death actually comes. In the days of his health and

strength, David sang with a sweetness that has thrilled through all the generations since, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me:" in the days when he stood in the actual presence of the last enemy, the aged hand had not lost its former cunning with the harp, the sweet singer of Israel had forfeited nothing of his old sweetness, and the believing heart had been robbed by the veritable presence of its foe of none of its younger faith: "These be the last words of David. . . . Although my house be not so with God, yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although He make it not to grow." The promise which is sufficient to the believing man in the day of his strength and peace, is equally sufficient in the day of his weakness and death.

Verses 15—19.—OTHNIEL'S CONQUEST OF DEBIR.

Debir, or Kirjath-Sepher, has already been briefly noticed under chap. x. 38. Why it was called "the city of the oracle," or "the city of the book," is unknown. Nor has the site of the city been yet determined. Some have identified it with *Dewîr-ban*, on the hills which stand on the north side of the *Wady Nunkûr*, about three miles west of Hebron. In this direction, according to Schwarz, there is also a *Wady Dibir*. Van de Velde, however, placed Debir at *Dilbeh*, about six miles south-west of Hebron, which seems more in harmony with the order of arrangement in verses 48—50. In any case Debir must be held to have been sufficiently near to Hebron to have made its possession by an enemy uncomfortable to Caleb. Hence the attack, which is proposed as soon as Hebron is taken.

The narrative of the taking of Debir is scarcely suitable for the purposes of a public discourse, at least not on ordinary occasions, nor by sentimental preachers. Nor can the verses be pleaded as having any authority beyond that which may be found in the conduct of an honourable man like Caleb. The following analysis is given principally as marking certain traits of character in those concerned, which should nevertheless be estimated in view of the then existing opinions as to a father's rights in giving his daughter in marriage.

**I. The spirit which influenced Caleb in the disposal of Achsah.** He sought to unite her to a man (1) *honourable for his zeal and energy*, (2) *conspicuous for his bravery*, (3) *and willing to use his strength in the way of the Lord's commandments.* (4) It seems likely also that Caleb sought to unite his daughter *to one who was in a social station akin to her own.* The promise was not to the man who should first *enter* Kirjath-Sepher. This may have been the nature of the similar promise at the siege of Jerusalem, under David, although it seems by no means certain that, even in this instance, David did not refer to *the captain* who should first bring *his company* into Jebus, and smite the garrison. He should be *chief captain.* (Cf. 2 Sam. v. 8; 1 Chron. xi. 6.) However this may have been, Caleb's promise ran, "He that *smiteth* Kirjath-Sepher, *and taketh it*, to him," *etc.* No man single-handed could "smite and take" a fortified city; and thus the promise probably refers to the leaders of the army who were under Caleb. This view has also the advantage that it does not exhibit to us an honourable man like Caleb putting up his daughter as the object of a wretched scramble, where a mere accident of a stumble or a wound might decide whose she should be. Possibly there were but few of the commanders under Caleb officially qualified to lead one or more divisions of the army against Debir; and, of these, Othniel might first have volunteered, or he only might have volunteered to lead the attack. Any way, out of regard for Achsah, Othniel was one who offered to conduct the assault, and he succeeded. It is simply hideous to think of a good man like Caleb putting up his child, with all her future happiness at stake, as a reward to any man who, in the degrading and miserable scramble of an army, might first enter the city. The case so generally quoted, 1 Sam. xvii. 25, is not parallel to this supposition, and even if it were, Caleb was not Saul.

II. The harmony between the father and the daughter. 1. *Achsah accorded with her father's will and with the custom of the age.* There can be no doubt but that, at this period, a father was held to have an absolute right to the disposal of his daughter's hand (cf. Gen. xxix. 18—28; Exod. xxi. 7—11; 1 Sam. xvii. 25, etc.); it does not follow, however, that a father would not consult his daughter's wishes. 2. *She had confidence in her father's love, notwithstanding her recognition of his authority.* She asked for a larger dowry (ver. 19). On leaving her father, to cleave to her husband, we thus find her seeking her husband's interest. 3. *Her father cheerfully responded to her request.* The confidence which was bold to ask, was met by an affection which was pleased to bestow.

III. The honourable character in which this brief history introduces Othniel. He comes before us as a man of courage, willing to risk his life for the woman he loved. He is seen to perhaps even more advantage in not preferring the request which Achsah prompted him to make. He may have refused to comply with his wife's wishes. The history does not actually say this; it merely shews that Achsah made her request herself. Othniel was bold enough to fight; he seems to have been too manly to have allowed himself to ask for this addition to what was, probably, already a just and good inheritance. He was brave enough to do battle against Debir; he was not mean enough to beg. If Achsah needed a larger dowry, such a request would come better from herself. These features are well in harmony with the dignity to which Othniel afterwards rose, and with the way in which he seems to have acquitted himself as the first of the judges of Israel.

Verse 63.—The Date at which the Book of Joshua was written.

On this verse Keil remarks as follows:—"The author closes the catalogue of the cities with the historical announcement, that the children of Judah could not drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem, and that the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day. This statement applies to the interval between Joshua and David, to the period after the death of Joshua, when the children of Judah had already once taken and burnt this city, which stood upon the borders of their territory (Judges i. 8), but were still unable to maintain it, and were therefore obliged, as were also the children of Benjamin, to whom Jerusalem was allotted, to occupy it in common with the Jebusites, whom they could not expel. The statement undoubtedly presupposes the period *after* Joshua, but it does not involve a contradiction either to chap. xviii. 28, or Judges i. 21; for it is not said here that Jerusalem belonged to the tribe of Judah, or that the children of Judah alone had set up a claim to it, to the exclusion of Benjamin."

Although the verse seems undoubtedly to require a time after the death of Joshua for its insertion here, it still more emphatically claims to have been written prior to the time when David overcame the Jebusites, and henceforth reigned in Jerusalem. *After that event, this verse could certainly not have been written.* Fay, who more or less fully adopts the view of Knobel (who places the "Jehovist" author of this book as late as "the last years of Hezekiah"), studiously avoids saying anything about the verse, excepting that it is "important for determining the date of the composition of the book." He refers his readers to his "Introduction, § 2," where the only notice taken of the passage is in half a line quoted from Keil, and he further says, under this verse, "See more on xviii. 28," where he says about it nothing whatever. It is much to be regretted that when the importance of the verse had been admitted, the direction in which its important testimony bears was not also acknowledged.

The Inability of Judah to Drive out the Jebusites.

I. The inability which comes through unbelief. Why could not Judah drive out the Jebusites? Had not God promised to be with the Israelites in their conflicts? Was the Lord's arm shortened, that it could not save? We cannot

think this for a moment. God had repeatedly spoken to His people as though they were not only responsible for giving battle, but also responsible for getting the victory (Exod. xxiii. 27—33, xxxiv. 11, 12; Deut. vii. 17—24, etc.). Only unbelief, coming from conscious sin, or as a weak distrust of God, could have made Judah feel that they were unequal to this task. Is not our unbelief equally manifest now, when we decline work to which God has bidden us, on the ground that we are unable to perform it?

**II. Unbelief working fear and inaction.** The men of Judah had already been victorious in part. They had overcome and destroyed at least the lower half of the city (Judges i. 8). It needed only that they should continue their struggle, and, according to the Divine promise, they must have taken the upper city also. They could not, however, bring themselves to believe that God would give the fortress of the Jebusites into their hands. When God fails our hearts, our hearts may well fail before our enemies. When faith departs, fear necessarily enters in its place. Thus zeal departs also, and inaction and indifference follow.

**III. Fear and inaction resulting in continued shame and suffering.** The Israelites had to suffer nearly four centuries of insult and humiliation from the Jebusites. As a crowning exhibition of their scorn, they manned the walls with the lame and the blind, and bade David dispossess them if he could (2 Sam. v. 6). The work which the men of Benjamin and Judah failed to do at first, had to be done, after all. It is ever thus; unbelief delivers us from little of our work ultimately, and so long as it delays our work, is continually fruitful both of shame and pain. It is he who hearkens to his Lord's commandments, and obeys, who finds that his peace flows like a river.

## CHAPTERS XVI., XVII.

### *THE INHERITANCE OF THE CHILDREN OF JOSEPH.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—CHAPTER XVI. 1—4. **The lot of the children of Joseph**] Although Jacob had adopted the sons of Joseph to be as his own children (Gen. xlviii. 5), and prophesied concerning them as the heads of two distinct tribes in Israel, yet in the chapter of tribal blessings he had spoken of them under the one name of Joseph (Gen. xlix. 22—26). Moses, also, though recognising the division into the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, had likewise given them a single blessing in the name of their common father (Deut. xxxiii. 13—17). Thus the one lot for the two tribes was almost anticipated by these prophecies. As Calvin suggested, "the admirable counsel of God arranged that the brothers should be neighbours to each other." As the situation of the two tribes was designated by a common lot, and an intermingling of territory is spoken of in ver. 9, it seems more convenient that these two chapters should be treated as one. 1. **Fell**] *Lit.*, "came forth;" *i.e.*, "came out of the urn, or chest," says Clericus, whom Keil follows, in opposition to the opinion of Rosenmüller, that the reference is to the land, which "came out from Jordan." *etc.* **The water of Jericho**] The fountain now known as *Ain es-Sultan*, to the overflowing of which the neighbouring plain owes so much of its ferility. Here Elisha wrought his miracle of "healing the waters" (2 Kings ii. 19—22). Dr. Robinson placed the site of the first Jericho by this fountain of Elisha, and that of the late Jericho by the opening of the *Wady Kelt*. **The wilderness that goeth up from Jericho**] This is the wilderness of Bethaven (chap. vii. 2; xviii. 12). 2. **From Bethel to Luz**] Knobel, and others, rendering the words as a composite noun, read "from Bethel-Luzah." Keil understands the sense to be, "from the *mountains of Bethel*, from which the boundary-line proceeded to the city of Luz, *i.e.*, to Bethel itself." Undoubtedly, from the way in which they are invariably mentioned as one place, Luz should not be put, as by Crosby, "three and a half miles west of Bethel." But cf. below, Dr. Cassel's remarks on Judges i. 22. **The borders of Archi to Ataroth**] "The border of the Archite." The Archites or Erechites, in Canaan, may have been descended from some settlers from the Erech of Nimrod (Gen. x. 10), in the land of Babylonia. "David's friend," or "companion," Hushai the Archite, is the subject of the only further reference which is made to this name (2 Sam. xv. 32, xvi. 16; 1 Chron. xxvii. 33). Ataroth, according to Robinson, is the modern *Atara*, about four miles south of Jiljilia, and must be distinguished from the ruins of Atara, near to *er Ram*. The latter is mentioned in verse 7, while the former is named again as Ataroth-addar in verse 5 and in chap. xviii. 13. 3. **Beth-horon the nether**] The lower Beth-horon is now *Beit-ûr, et Tachta*. In common with Gezer (cf. on chap. x. 33) it was afterwards given to

the Kohathites (chap. xxi. 21, 22). 4. So the children of Joseph, *etc.*] Thus the southern boundary only is given, "which, in chap. xviii. 12, 13, is repeated as the northern border of Benjamin. 5—8. The border of the children of Ephraim, *etc.*] These verses contain a description which seems involved in inextricable confusion. This is perhaps, principally owing to three things: the places named are few, and thus far apart, marking, probably, some of the extreme positions; the sites of the places are nearly all unknown; and further, the inter-tribal line between these brother tribes seems to have been very complex, and, owing to the intermingling named in verse 9, may have been, at places, hardly capable of clear description in a brief record. Added to this, it is possible that some attempts may have been made by copyists to make the text clearer, these resulting eventually in greater obscurity than ever. Some such process may account for the utterly incomprehensible opening clause of verse 6; or, as between verses 59, 60, a passage may have been left out between verses 5, 6, rendering what follows unintelligible. 9. The separate cities] These were possibly so assigned, in order that by the intermingling of the two tribes the bond of brotherhood might be perpetuated.

CHAPTER XVII.—1. A lot for the tribe of Manasseh] The families of the tribe as a whole are here taken into account, the notice of them extending to the close of the sixth verse. Machir] Cf. on chap. xiii. 31. The father of Gilead] "The ruler or possessor of the land of Gilead." "This is apparent from the fact that 'Machir' does not stand for any individual in this passage, but for an entire family, and also from the use of the article before 'Gilead,' which always denotes the province (cf. Numb. xxxii. 40; Deut. iii. 10, sqq.; Josh. xiii. 11, 31; xvii. 1, 5); whereas Machir's son or grandson of that name is invariably called 'Gilead' (without the article), as in Numb xxvi. 29; Joshua xvii. 3; 1 Chron. vii. 17." [*Keil.*] 2. The rest of the children of Manasseh] Cf. passages indicated in margin. 3. No sons, but daughters] The case of the daughters of Zelophehad not only caused this provision to be made for them, but supplied an opportunity for special regulations for all similar cases (cf. Numb. xxvii. 1—11, xxxvi.). 5, 6. Ten portions, *etc.*] On account of the daughters of Zelophehad inheriting their father's estate, the lot of the half-tribe of Manasseh, west of the Jordan, had first to be divided into six portions, according to the number of the families. Then the Hepherite inheritance for the five daughters had again to be divided into five portions, one for each daughter, thus making ten portions. 7—10. From Asher to Michmethah, *etc.*] It is generally agreed that "Asher" must be read as the name of a town, and not as indicating the territory of the tribe of that name, but so little is known of the places mentioned in this and the following verses, that it has been found impossible to trace the border with any assurance of correctness. 10. They met together in Asher] *Heb.*, "they touched upon Asher," etc. The pl. pronoun, of course, refers to the children of Manasseh, and not to the two tribes previously named; *i.e.*, "the Manassites touched upon Asher," the people being put for their territory. 11. Manasseh had in Issachar and in Asher, *etc.*] To which the clause of verse 10, just noticed, refers. As the children of Ephraim had separate cities in the lot of Manasseh (chap. xvi. 9), so the children of Manasseh had separate cities within the borders of Issachar and Asher. Bethshean] Also "Bethshean" in Judges i. 27; but later on, oftener Bethshan (1 Sam. xxxi. 10; 2 Sam. xxi. 12). It is frequently named in connection with the Maccabees, where it is also called Scythopolis (2 Macc. xii. 29). It is now *Beisân*, lying in the Jordan valley between the river and Mount Gilboa. Ibleam] Where Ahaziah was mortally wounded, and near "the ascent to Gur" (2 Kings ix. 27). Dor] Now *Tantûra*. It was formerly a royal city of the Canaanites (chap. xi. 2, xii. 23), and was subsequently the local centre where, as one of his twelve officers, or purveyors, Solomon stationed his son-in-law Abinadab (1 Kings iv. 11). In the time of the Maccabees, Dor was besieged by Antiochus Sidetes (1 Macc. xv. 11—14). Endor] *Lit.*, Ain-Dor, the "eye" or "spring of Dor," but in no way connected with the Dor just noticed. Eusebius placed it four miles south of Tabor. It was long famous as the scene of the victory over Sisera and Jabin (Ps. lxxxiii. 10), and for Saul's interview with "the witch" (1 Sam. xxviii. 7). Taanach . . . Megiddo] Cf. on chap. xii. 21. Three countries] *Heb.*, "three heights." "What is intended is the three cities lying on hills: Endor, Taanach, and Megiddo, a Tripolis of mountain cities, in distinction from the places on the plain: Bethshean, Ibleam, and Dor." [*Fay.*] 14. One lot and one portion] As stated also in chap. xvi. 1, on which see note. The single drawing, however, did not necessarily limit the portion. Referring to their conduct as stated in Judges viii. 1, xii. 1, Crosby remarks that "the Ephraimites were probably the principal complainers." This is the more likely when we remember that they may have presumed on their relation to Joshua, who was of their tribe (Numb. xiii. 8). The complainers did not come to Eleazar, like the daughters of Zelophehad (verse 4), although the high priest stood first in the matter of directing the lots (cf. chap. xiv. 1); but, as though they counted on his interest, they brought their case, craftily stated, to Joshua. 15. The wood country] *Heb.*, "forest." "The mountain range (verse 18), then covered with timber trees, to which Joshua (like the prophet Amos, ii. 9), compares the tall Canaanites. This view seems more probable than that of Stanley (*Sinai and Pal.*, p. 518) and others, who locate this forest on the other side of Jordan, and make it identical with 'the wood of Ephraim,' where Absalom met his fate (2 Sam. xviii. 6). It is true that the Rephaim, or giants, were once in that locality, but they were settled in many other places, and we do not read of Perizzites east of Jordan." [*Groser.*] Keil's remark, however, on the places named in the next verse, disposes of any doubt which might remain: "This clearly proves that '*hayya'ar*' ('the forest') refers to the mountains of Gilboa, which were bounded on the east by Bethshean, and on the west by the plain of Jezreel." 16. The

hill is not enough] Or, "the mountain," as it is again called in verse 18. Probably the children of Joseph alluded to the hill-land generally, *including* the Gilboa region, or forest-land which Joshua had just offered them. Chariots of iron] Cf. on chap. xi. 4. 17. And Joshua spake, *etc.*] He repeated, still in ironical reproof of their covetousness and fear, what he had previously said. He uses their own talk about their greatness as the greatest possible argument against the spirit which they manifest.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE PARAGRAPHS*

### Chapter XVI.—Verse 1.—The Precedence of Ephraim.

As between these "children of Joseph," Ephraim takes precedence of Manasseh. Though, as the elder son, Manasseh is named first in verse 4, yet the lot of Ephraim stands first in the record, and occupies the more important position in the land. This is as Jacob had prophesied it should be (Gen. xlviii. 13—20). The ancient scene of the blessing of Joseph's children, when compared with their inheritance as shewn here, is instructive. Joseph had opposed Jacob, but Jacob was right and Joseph wrong. Putting together the circumstances of Jacob's prophecy, and the sequel which the history here begins to reveal, the following thoughts are suggested:

I. **God's special presence and guidance sometimes vouchsafed to the dying, not imaginary, but real.** It does not appear that dying Jacob had received any particular promise that God would especially direct him in giving his prophetic blessings. Jacob assumed that it was so. The dying do not care for proofs and arguments. They simply believe, and thus speak. Jacob did not trouble himself with any explanation. He did not even claim God's special teaching. He merely answered to Joseph's objection, "I know it, my son, I know it;" and then, in the calmness of a man fully assured, went on with his blessing. Jacob believed that God was directing him. "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph" (Heb. xi. 21). Jacob had no great precedent for conduct like this. Dying Moses could look back and see how God had honoured Jacob's trust, but Jacob could look back on nothing similar. He simply felt that God was with him, and was guiding him so unerringly, that the knowledge of his pious son Joseph must not be suffered, for a moment, to break in upon his own confidence. Jacob was not deceived. The history which begins in this appointment of the lots, goes on to assert through many generations that it was indeed God who had set Ephraim before Manasseh, though the elder son "also should be great." Is not God thus present with His dying servants now, if not for prophecy, yet for support? He Himself has said, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee."

II. **God's special guidance of His servants in death sufficiently realized to enable their faith to overcome all obstacles.** Take into consideration the circumstances by which Jacob was surrounded, and it will be seen that it was no light matter for him to persist in his trust. 1. *There was the difficulty of getting away from Egypt.* Would that be suffered by the Egyptians? Would the Israelites, settled in the fat land of Goshen, unanimously care to leave? 2. *There was the task of overcoming the Canaanites.* Jacob had lived among them during great part of his life, and must have well known of those cities "walled up to heaven," and inhabited here by the Rephaim, there by the Anakim. 3. *There was the division of the tribe of Joseph into two tribes.* How was that to be brought about? Was Israel to have thirteen tribes? If not, which son was to give place? and how was he to be induced to give place? 4. *Then there was the supremacy of Ephraim.* Would not this be contested, even as Jacob's own supremacy over Esau? Thus, in addition to the opposition of Joseph, and the weakness imposed by the presence of death, these things stood confronting the aged patriarch's faith. He

did not so much as speak of them as making the issue doubtful. He felt God to be so manifestly with him, that no amount of obstacles could present any measure of difficulty. So sufficient is God's presence in the hour of His people's need.

III. The special guidance of God in even the weak and dying, transcending physical strength and mental vigour. Joseph was strong, and Jacob was weak; the son could see, but the father's eyes were dim with age; the younger man's faculties and powers of mental perception were in the very pride of maturity, while the elder man was feeling throughout his entire frame the decay which precedes dissolution; yet Jacob was right, and Joseph was in error. The guidance of God in the feeblest is better than human perception at its best. Even the blind err not when the Lord leads them. The cultivated intellect of Joseph fails to discern the future of his children; the divinely taught, though decaying mind of Jacob, not only reads the centuries to come, but does not so much as think of the possibility of any mistake.

IV. The special guidance of God surpassing the ordinary spiritual apprehensions of an unusually faithful and pious life. Jacob's life had been one full of grave mistakes. He had obtained the birthright of his brother through deep craft and oft-repeated lies. He may fairly be regarded as the prototype of commercial sharpness and cunning. He bargained with men, and even bargained with God. He assumed a demeanour of great moderation with Laban, depending on trickery to make the seeming moderation far more profitable than any open arrangement. His life was a long negotiation in the interest of himself. It had been eminently a life of self-seeking. Yet with all these "evil days," as he himself terms them, Jacob had believed unquestioningly in God. God had ever been his refuge in his times of distress, and, apparently, never forgotten in his times of prosperity. Nevertheless, the life of Jacob stands out in dark and painful contrast to the life of Joseph. Joseph had shewn the same ardent belief in God, and had testified to the beauty of his faith by the excellence of his fidelity. The story of Jacob's life is stained throughout, while that of Joseph comes down to us in an almost unsullied purity. For all this, in the instance before us, Jacob is unerringly right, and Joseph is wrong. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." "The pure in heart see God." This is the ordinary rule of life, and it is in no way shaken by this exception. God seems to teach us again, here, that no man must *rely* on his purity. Fidelity is one thing, infallibility another. God sometimes corrects the judgment of His most faithful servants through those whose lives are far inferior. This also is well, lest pride become the heritage of piety. Again, it should be remembered that the special teaching of God through the weak is far more unerring than the discernment of the most spiritual of minds momentarily left to themselves.

V. The superior wisdom of God's guidance waiting for the vindication of time. If not vindicated at the time, it was vindicated by time. Joseph quietly submitted to his father's strong assurance. He offered no further remonstrance. Joseph may even have believed that it would be as his father had declared. Of this, nothing is said. When nearly two hundred and fifty years had passed, God began to confirm the words of Jacob by providing in another manner for the tribe of Levi, and in these appointments of the lots of Joseph's children. The vision which God gives may tarry, yet it is for "an appointed time." Divine proofs are never hastened, and ultimately they never fail.

### Verse 2.—The Distinction between Bethel and Luz.

The following excellent note by Dr. Cassel deals with three passages which have often been found difficult to harmonise with the statement. "Bethel, *which is Luz*," frequently occurring elsewhere: (1) with the obscure phrase "from Bethel to Luz," in this verse; (2) with the difficulty in chapter xviii. 13, 22, where, while Bethel is said to belong to Benjamin, the border of that tribe is stated to be south of Luz; (3) and finally, with the representation in Judges i.

22—25, in which the children of Joseph are seen taking and occupying what might appear to be a city of Benjamin.

"As Jebus and Jerusalem are always identified, so it is everywhere remarked of Bethel, that it was formerly Luz; and as Jebus indicated particularly the fortress, Jerusalem the city,—although the latter name embraced both,—so a similar relation must be assumed to have existed between Bethel and Luz. Otherwise the border of Benjamin could not have run south of Luz (Josh. xviii 13), while nevertheless Bethel was reckoned among the cities of Benjamin (Josh. xviii. 22). This assumption, moreover, explains the peculiar phraseology of Josh. xviii. 13: 'And the border went over from thence toward Luz' (after which we expect the usual addition, 'which is Bethel;' but that which does follow is,) 'on the south side of Luz, which is Bethel.' It explains likewise the mention (Josh. xvi. 2) of the border 'from Bethel to Luz,' *i.e.*, *between* Bethel and Luz. The latter was evidently a fortress, high and strong, whose city descended along the mountain slope. When Jacob erected his altar, it must have been on this slope or in the valley. One name designated both fortress and city, but this does not militate against their being distinguished from each other. Bethel belonged to two tribes in a similar manner as Jerusalem. The capture of Luz by Joseph would not have been told in a passage which treats of the conflicts of the individual tribes in their own territories, if that fortress had not belonged to the tribes of Joseph. By the conquest of Luz, Joseph secured the possession of Bethel, since both went by that name, just as David, when he had taken the fortress of the Jebusites, was for the first time master of Jerusalem. This deed is related as contrasting with the conduct of Benjamin (Judg. i. 21). Benjamin did nothing to take the fortress of Zion: Joseph went up to Luz, and God was with him (Judg. i. 22). This remark had been impossible, if, as has been frequently assumed, the tribe of Joseph had arbitrarily appropriated to itself the city which had been promised to Benjamin. The view of ancient Jewish expositors, who assume a Bethel in the valley and one on the mountain, does not differ from that here suggested. Robinson seems to have established the position of the ancient Bethel near the present Beitîn, where scattered ruins occupy the surface of a hill-point. A few minutes to the north-east, on the highest spot of ground in the vicinity, are other ruins, erroneously supposed to be Ai by the natives: these also, perhaps, belonged to Bethel. It cannot, however, be said that until Robinson this position was entirely unknown. Eshtori ha-Parchi, who in his time found it called Bethai, the *l* having fallen away, was evidently acquainted with it. In another work of the fourteenth century, the then current name of Bethel is said to be Bethin." [*Cassel, Lange's Com.*]

Verse 10.—THE WEAKNESS AND INCONSISTENCY OF UNBELIEF.

**I. A stronghold thought by God's people to be too strong for them to subdue, notwithstanding Divine promises to the contrary.**

**II. A stronghold which, it is pretended, cannot be overcome, and yet is put under tribute.**

**III. A stronghold too strong for unbelieving men who might have had the help of omnipotence, and presently taken by foreign idolaters, and given to the nation.** (Cf. 1 Kings ix. 16.)

CHAPTER XVII. Verses 3, 4.—THE INHERITANCE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD.

"Men are so much devoted to their own interests, that it seldom occurs to them to give others their due. The daughters of Zelophehad had obtained a portion by a heavenly decree, nor had any one dared to utter a word against it; and yet, if they had remained silent, no regard would have been paid to them. Therefore, lest the delay should prove injurious to them, they apply to Joshua and Eleazar, and insist that they shall not be deprived of their legitimate suc-

cession. No delay is interposed by Joshua to prevent their immediately obtaining what is just, nor is there any murmuring on the part of the people. Hence we infer that all were disposed to act equitably; but every one was occupied by his own interest, and too apt carelessly to overlook that of others." [*Calvin.*]

THE INFLUENCE OF SELF IN OUR FORGETFULNESS OR REMEMBRANCE OF THE DIVINE COMMANDMENTS.

The remarks quoted above, coupled with the history in Numbers xxvii. 1—7, suggest some important considerations on the way in which men read the Scriptures. Men insensibly teach the Bible from their own standpoint. Self is a much more important factor in the practical results of our reading the Bible than most of us are aware of, or would be ready to admit. What seems not to bless us we are continually overlooking; that which promises us something we see very readily indeed; and that which is obscure, and can be construed to our personal advantage, seldom finds us troubled with the obscurity or in the least doubtful about the meaning.

I. **The words of the Lord utterly forgotten through self-seeking.** The Israelites seem to have been caring each for the things that were his own. God's words, apparently, had simply passed out of mind. Some of the people may have been guilty intentionally, but probably most of them transgressed unconsciously. There is a great deal of the book of God forgotten like this every day now. Many who learned whole chapters under their mothers' teaching, or in Sunday-schools, have been so eagerly pursuing their own things in the world, that they have not remembered for years any single verse which would tend to diminish their inheritance and increase that of their neighbours. Many have remembered such words, but they have kept them secret. They have hidden them even from their own hearts.

II. **The words of the Lord neglected under the pressure of temporal cares.** Many good men, who would have reminded the leaders of Israel of this promise, had been so busy that it had not occurred to them. Eleazar had forgotten the words, and Joshua had forgotten them: Caleb, whose way it had been for many years to follow the Lord fully, had thought of his own inheritance a great deal, but not anything about the inheritance of these fatherless and brotherless women. The whole tribe of the disinterested Levites appear to have forgotten the words also. Just then, life was so hurried; there had been so much for men to think about, and so much to do. How much Bible is there forgotten in our great cities every day from like causes? How much is forgotten "on 'Change"? How much in merchants' offices, in busy manufactories, in shops, and in homes? How much Scripture is forgotten, under pressure of work, by the farmer in his fields? how much by the labourer who toils for him?

III. **The words of the Lord remembered and pleaded under the influence of personal interest.** Although the Israelites, by hundreds of thousands, had forgotten the command of God, these daughters of Zelophehad had not forgotten. How readily we all remember such words of Scripture as tend to our personal benefit! Men remember words which support their individual claims. They remember words which seem to exonerate themselves. They remember words which reflect on others. What is remembered through personal interest is generally pleaded with readiness and urgency. Our very faculties tend to partiality. Memory and eloquence are quickened by nothing so much as by individual interest. Only let there be something to inherit, and forthwith the meanest capabilities become efficient.

Verses 12, 13.—LITTLE WILL, AND THUS NO WAY.

I. **Inability in its relation to unbelief.** The promises of God had been many, and the warnings urgent (Exod. xxxiv. 10—17; Numb. xxxiii., 50—56, etc.). They who begin by disbelieving God may well fear to encounter powerful enemies.

**II. Inability in its relation to indisposition.** The indisposition that comes (1) through fear of men, (2) through love of ease, (3) through undervaluing the importance of God's command.

**III. The inability of God-aided men presently shewn to be a mere pretence and a poor excuse.** 1. *The revelation which comes through transgressors themselves.* "When the children of Israel were waxen strong, they put the Canaanites to tribute." "Could not" is here seen to be "would not." That "tribute" told the entire story in its true colours. It was a history in a word. Tribute goes on telling secrets still. Probably nothing else in this world tells so many. The tribute of Judas burned into his very soul, till he threw the thirty pieces on the temple floor, and cried over them in agony, "I have betrayed innocent blood." The tribute of the young ruler's great possessions became a text from which Christ preached, "How hardly shall they that have riches," etc. The tribute of the craft by which Demetrius had his wealth, let out the secret reason of his great love for the despised Diana (Acts xix. 24—27). The tribute of the world betrayed the reason why Demas forsook Paul. It is ever thus. The robber's biggest trouble is with his spoil. The ambitious man mounts the pedestal which he has long been striving to climb, and then tells his secret on the top. The dishonest merchant cannot keep his gains from preaching. Transgressors win their way to success unobserved, and then betray themselves with the very gains they have won. 2. *The revelation which comes through those who succeed transgressors.* Out of this very section of the tribe of Manasseh arose Gideon, of the family of the Abi-ezrites (cf. ver. 2). On this very ground of the half-tribe of Manasseh was fought the great battle which delivered Israel from the Midianites. And how was it fought? By an army from which more than thirty thousand had been sent to their homes; by a small force of three hundred men, who merely brake their pitchers, and held their torches on high, shedding light on a truth afterwards embodied in one of the famous sayings of Israel, "The battle is the Lord's." It was as though God was purposely reproving the faint-heartedness and idleness of these men who had lived in the days of Joshua. He who says to us by His apostle, "Prove all things," will not fail to establish the truth of His own word. It was not God's promises which had proved weak when "the children of Manasseh could not conquer those cities" in their new lot; it was the children of Manasseh themselves who were weak. God revealed this in the taking of the tribute, and still more fully in the victory of the reduced army which only began to fight when the battle was won. Probably the future will declare, no less fully, that all our failures have been in no measure God's, but entirely ours.

Verses 14—18.—DIVINE METHODS OF INHERITING.

The tribe of Ephraim and the half-tribe of Manasseh appear to have had the position of their inheritances indicated by a single lot. According to the principles regulating the division of the land, this would in no measure have restricted the extent of their possessions (cf. Numb. xxvi. 54). Thus this tribe and a half of the descendants of Joseph, in saying, "Why hast thou given us but one lot?" were endeavouring to make capital by an equivocal representation. In view of that wrong spirit, Joshua answered them. He treated their request with the rejection which it deserved. In taking this course we feel at once that Joshua followed the mind and will of God.

**I. In the Divine plan there is little room for inheriting by what men suppose to be their own inherent merits.** "I am a great people.' Many people feel that they are the same. They think that their greatness ought to be recognised both by Providence and by men. They are quite sure that they ought to stand higher up in life. If a man had his deserts, there would be few above him! God's answer, through His servants, and through all the inspired voices of life, is: "Prove your greatness. Do something with it. Level the woods;

clear the mountains; make the giants give place before you; thus you will assert your greatness in a way beyond contradiction, and men will recognise it." Our greatness is not to consist in pride. It is not to be established by advertisements. No tongue is eloquent enough to proclaim its owner's worth. In the advocacy of our personal merits only actions can be allowed to speak. The tongue has never been elected to this parliament.

II. **In the Divine plan of inheriting, past blessing gives no immunity from present or future labours.** "The Lord hath blessed me hitherto." True; God had blessed Joseph through his father, Jacob, through Moses, and through the actual multiplication of his children. And the good people found this kind of thing very comfortable. It was very nice to be blessed. Why should they not be blessed always? Because an opportunity had now come for work; and if they wanted to utilise even past blessings, they must do so through work. Some people are always remembering how they used to be favoured. God blesses us gratis when we are children. God blesses us for nothing when we are in the desert, and have little opportunity for service. When the field for service is before us, then, lest our very blessings should turn into curses, the Lord ever says by some voice or other: "If you would be blessed any more, you must work. Henceforth your labour shall be the channel through which my mercies shall run to refresh your life." If we stop up the channel, we must not wonder if the streams of Divine favour are turned in some other direction. No man can afford to live on his past.

III. **In the Divine plan there is no room for selfishness, and no place for unfair patronage.** "And Joshua answered," etc. They had come, not to Eleazar, like the daughters of Zelophehad (ver. 3, 4), but to Joshua, who was their relative (Numb. xiii. 8), thinking, probably, that the leader of Israel would be disposed to favour his own tribe. To increase the greatness of Ephraim would be to act kindly by his own people; to increase the greatness of Ephraim would be to add to his own greatness. Put plainly, that seems to have been their real argument. Joshua rejects the pleadings, both the manifest pleadings and the hidden. The recognition of adventitious circumstances is not God's way of inheriting. A man's greatness must be within him, not upon him.

IV. **In the Divine plan the way to a larger inheritance is ever through the expulsion of enemies.** "If thou be a great people, then," etc. (verses 15—18). 1. *Our increase of inheritance is not to come through robbing our brethren of some of theirs.* To straiten the lot of Benjamin and Issachar, in order to increase the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, is not the way of the God of Israel. It is not by robbing another that a man can increase his own. The robber always loses more manhood than he gets land. 2. *Our increase of inheritance is to be through conflict with the foes of God and truth.* The relation of Israel to the Canaanites was special, and the like can never occur between man and man now. But we have spiritual foes against whom we are each bidden to contend (cf. Eph. vi. 10—18). We have error to oppose, and new territory to win for the occupation of truth.

V. **The Divine plan may have many difficulties, but it also reveals great encouragements.** "Thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong." 1. *Error may be tenacious, but so is truth.* The idolatry of the land of Canaan could only be removed by the removal of the idolaters. Error holds as strongly to the human heart as ever. But truth is not less strong. Every man who fairly lodges a new and holy truth in the heart of his fellow has planted what can never be wholly removed again. He who has sown new truths abroad in the world has sown for immortality. "Every plant which your heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up," said the Saviour. Surely what He has planted cannot be uprooted. Some one has said:

"The truth once uttered, and 'tis like
A star new-born, that drops into its place,
And which once circling in its placid round,
Not all the tumult of the earth can shake."

The labour of getting truth to take the place of error is arduous, but the results are abiding. 2. *Enemies may be strong, but God is greater than them all.* These men of Ephraim and Manasseh were alarmed at the Perizzites and the Rephaim; but Joshua, who knew the sufficiency of the help of the Lord, could say unhesitatingly, "Thou shalt drive them out." The Christian man who has only learned the strength of his enemies may well be sad; he who has proved the arm of Jehovah will need to contemplate nothing but victory.

DISCONTENTMENT.

I. The easy way to discontentment. Anybody can complain. Everybody is tempted to complain. Most of those who murmur think that they can shew good cause for their complaints. No man is rich enough to be out of the reach of discontent. No man is poor enough to be below the possibility of happiness. "Poor and content is rich, and rich enough." It was from a life very great in its experience of suffering that there came forth to the world that ever memorable utterance, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

II. The unfailing testimony of discontentment. 1. *Complaints furnish no trustworthy evidence about a man's lot.* How can they, when so many murmur in every kind of lot which the world knows? 2. *Complaints bear unfailing witness against the murmurer himself.* Scripture often condemns the man who complains, apart from considering the cause of complaining. The words "murmur," "impatience," "covetous," "envy," are always treated as so many synonyms for sin, quite irrespective of the circumstances which men treat as justifying such states of mind. Shakspeare wrote:

"My crown is in my heart, not on my head;
Not decked with diamonds and Indian stones,
Nor to be seen: my crown is called content;
A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy."

The owner of the humblest inheritance may say that; every Christian should say it. It was He who said, "The Son of man hath not where to lay His head," who presently added, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." This world's great legacy of joy came to it from the Man of sorrows.

III. The true answer to discontentment. 1. *Joshua was too wise to dispute the assumption of greatness* (verses 15, 17). He who tries to argue a discontented man out of his favourite assumptions does but waste breath. 2. *Joshua turned the plea of greatness back on those who used it:* "If thou be a great people, then"—work, fight. 3. *Joshua sought to cure the murmuring of the heart through the diligence of the hand.* The energy which is absorbed in gloomy thoughts, and poured out in bitter complaints, would generally double the small inheritance, if it were rightly directed. Apart from this, industry and courage ever tend to happiness. 4. *Joshua encouraged these murmurers to think that to the people of God no difficulties were insuperable.* He would have them think of the invincible might which had promised to support their faithful efforts (cf. Deut. xx. 1—4), and make them victorious.

The after history shews us that a discontented spirit is not easily cured. These people shewed the same haughty dissatisfaction again and again after the death of Joshua (cf. Judges viii. 1—3; xii. 1—6). He who has cultivated contentment through faith in God is not readily disturbed; while the man who has learned, in whatsoever state he is, to find some fault with his fellows, has given room in his heart for a demon that is not easily expelled. "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

IDLENESS, COVETOUSNESS, *etc.* "So it goes also with many an insincere combatant in the kingdom of God, that they would fain have many spiritual gifts, but without a strife." [*Lange.*]

"Many wish for larger possessions, who do not cultivate and make the best of what they have. They think they should have more talents given them, and do not trade with those with which they are intrusted. Most people's poverty is the effect of their idleness; would they dig, they need not beg." [*Henry.*]

"That is the way with the covetous man, that the more he has, the more he desires to have, and cannot but grudge his neighbour what belongs to him. One should be content with that which God gives. Those who are appointed to the duty of distributing goods and lands, however faithfully they may perform the service, yet commonly get no great thanks therefor." [*Starke.*]

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *THE ENCAMPMENT AT SHILOH, AND A FURTHER DIVISION OF THE LAND.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **Shiloh**]="*Place of rest*," or of "*tranquillity*;" the word apparently pointing to the fulfilment of the promise in Deut xii. 5, 9—11. Shiloh is now called *Seilûn* In Judg. xxi. 19, it is placed on the north side of Bethel, east of the road from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah. **The tabernacle of the congregation**] Luther = "*tent of the covenant*;" Calvin = "*tabernacle of convention*." Prof. Plumtre, remarking that the primary force of *yâ'ad* is "to meet by appointment," says that *ôhel mô'êd* means "*a place of or for a fixed meeting*." He would therefore translate, "*tent of meeting*;" to which Crosby adds the idea, "where the meeting is that of God and men, rather than of men together," as in the word for congregation used in the beginning of this verse. With the view of expressing somewhat more fully the idea of meeting to commune with men, made emphatic in such passages as Exod. xxv. 22, Ewald suggested the phrase, "*tent of revelation*." **And the land was subdued before them**] That is, there was nothing to hinder the setting up of the tabernacle, the surrounding district being entirely subjugated. Crosby strangely imagines, from this remark, "that there had been some formidable insurrection of the Canaanites that broke off the division at Gilgal." Possibly there may have been, but it is not mentioned. 4. **Three men for each tribe**] Probably meaning three men for each of the seven tribes whose inheritance had not yet been apportioned, but possibly including, also, representatives from Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh. **According to the inheritance of them**] "The phrase, *l'phî nach'âlâthâm* is thus explained by Clericus and Rosenmuller, 'according to the size of the tribes, each family of which was to receive an inheritance.' To this Masius has properly objected, 'How could the surveyors make such and such a province great or small in proportion to the size of such and such a tribe, when it had still to be decided by the lot, where each tribe was to be located?' *L'phî nach'âlâthâm* can only mean having regard to the fact that they were to receive it as an inheritance or as it is explained in ver. 5, 6, with reference to its being divided into seven parts, which could be allotted as an inheritance to the seven tribes." [*Keil.*] 5. **Judah shall abide**, *etc.*] The three tribes here named were to remain in the positions already chosen for them by the lot. But this did not prevent the subsequent revision of the *extent* of the lots which, after the survey, was found to be necessary, when Judah had to make room for both Dan and Simeon. 6. **Before the Lord our God**] Before the door of the tabernacle, as explained in chap. xix. 51. 9. **Described it by cities into seven parts in a book**] There is no evidence here, as many have supposed, for a careful survey of the country by actual measurement. Seeing that the Canaanites still held a considerable portion of the land (cf. chap. xiii. 1—6, etc.), such a survey seems highly improbable, if not impossible. Most likely the surveyors merely made catalogues of the cities, arranging them into seven groups, and making such notes of their size, and of the characteristic features and extent of the surrounding country as they were able. In any case, there is nothing in these verses to warrant elaborate speculations about maps, mensuration, and the ancient art of land-surveying. Looking at the usual method of describing the territory of the tribes, first by boundaries or borders, and then by an enumeration of the cities contained within such border-lines, we have in this alone some indication of the character of the work done by these surveyors. On the other hand, there is absolutely no trace of mensuration—no allusion whatever to quantities or size. 10. **There Joshua divided the land**, *etc.*] This was in addition to the casting of the lots, mentioned in the first part of this verse. That is to say, Joshua first cast lots to determine which of the seven groups of cities, with their surrounding territory, should go to each of the seven tribes; he then "divided the land" by readjusting the groups of cities themselves, according to the size of the tribe to which any particular group had fallen. A small tribe would have its lot

made smaller, while a numerous tribe would have its lot increased by the cities and lands thus taken from the tribe of fewer people. This would be according to the law of division which God gave through Moses (Numb. xxxiii. 54). 11—20. The lot of the tribe of Benjamin] This, it is said, "came up" and "came forth;" both expressions allude to the drawing up or forth from the urn. The borders of Benjamin, described in these verses, have already been partly given in defining the southern border of Ephraim, on the north, and the northern border of Judah, on the south of this tribe. 12, 13. Their border on the north side] Cf. on chap. xvi. 1—3, as far as to the lower Beth-horon. 14. Compassed the corner of the sea southward] *Heb.*="turned round on the *west side* toward the south," or "on the sea side," *i.e.*, on that side of the tribe which lay seaward. In the close of this verse, the word *yâm* is rendered "west;" and as the territory of Benjamin did not go near the sea, the word should obviously have the same meaning here. In Exod. xxvii. 12, xxxviii. 12, where *p'ath-yâm* is used in relation to the court of the tabernacle, it is necessarily translated "on the west side." The sea being on the west of Palestine, *yâm* (="the sea") seems frequently to have been used much in the same way that the phrase, "toward the sun-rising," was employed to denote the east. Kirjath-jearim] One of the four cities of the Gibeonites (chap. ix. 17), situated on the northern boundary of Judah (chap. xv. 9), and belonging to that tribe (chap. xv. 60), as stated also in this verse. It afterwards became notable in connection with the Danite encampment, and as the residence for twenty years of the ark of the Lord. 15—19. The south quarter] This corresponds with the north border of Judah, as given in chap. xv. 5—9, excepting that it is here taken from west to east. 21. The cities of the tribe] These are divided into two groups, the first containing twelve cities, and the second fourteen. Some of them have already been noticed. The valley of Keziz] This is said to have been "a city," and should therefore be read Emek Keziz. The LXX.='Αμεκασίς. Fay notices that Van de Velde and Knobel refer to "a *Wady el-Kaziz*, east of Jerusalem." 22. Zemaraim] "Earlier writers suppose that it stood upon Mount Zemaraim, one of the mountains of Ephraim, where Abijah besieged Jeroboam (2 Chron. xiii. 4). In that case it must be looked for in the mountains to the south of Bethel." [*Keil.*] "The Zemarites, once mentioned as a Canaanite tribe (Gen. x. 18), reappear in the local name of Mount Zemaraim in Benjamin, 2 Chron. xiii. 4, and Josh. xviii. 22." [*Dean Stanley.*] 23. Avim] "Since Avim here follows directly after Bethel, while Ai, which stood near Bethel, is not mentioned, it is natural with Knobel to regard Avim as identical with Ai, which is also called Aiah (Neh. xiii. 11), and Aiath (Isa. x. 23). The signification of all these names is essentially the same: ruins, heaps, stone-heaps (Mic. i. 6; see Gesen.)" [*Fay.*] Parah] Thought to be *Fârah*, on the *Wady Fârah*, to the west of Jericho. Ophrah] Perhaps the same as Ophrah in 1 Sam. xiii. 17, Ephraim in 2 Chron. xiii. 19, John xi. 54, and now known as *Taiyibeh*. It must not be confused with Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites, which was probably in Manasseh. 24. Chephar-haammonai and Ophni] Both unknown, and not mentioned elsewhere. Gaba] Elsewhere, Geba, "which," says Keil, "we must distinguish from Gibeah, or the Gibeah of Saul, which is also sometimes called Geba." (Compare Isa. x. 29, 1 Kings xv. 22, Josh. xxi. 17.) In Ezra ii. 26, Neh. vii. 30, it is again called Gaba. 25. Ramah="*a lofty place.*" Now *er-Ram*. It is frequently mentioned, and its position is clearly indicated by Judges iv. 5, xix. 13, 1 Kings xv. 22. It should be carefully distinguished from Ramah, the birthplace of Samuel, in "Mount Ephraim." Mizpeh] Not the same with the Mizpeh of chap. xv. 38, which stood in the Shephelah. There was also a Mizpeh in Moab (1 Sam. xxii. 3), one in Gad (Judg. xi. 29), and a valley of the same name in the mountains of Lebanon (cf. Gesen., Mizpeh and Mizpah). Mizpeh of Benjamin is where Samuel judged the people (1 Sam. vii. 5, 6, 16), and where Saul was chosen king (1 Sam. x. 17). It is almost certainly the present *Neby Samwil*. Chephirah] Cf. chap. ix. 3. The four cities which follow are unknown and are only named in this place. 28. Zelah] Mentioned in 2 Sam. xxi. 14 as containing the sepulchre of Kish, where the remains of Saul and Jonathan were ultimately buried. Gibeath] "The Gibea of Benjamin or Saul, so frequently referred to, which is still to be seen in the village of *Jeba*, between the *Wady es-Suweinit* and the *Wady Fârah*." [*Keil.*] Kirjath] Rosenmüller and Maurer, according to Keil, identified this place with Kirjath-jearim. Smith's Dictionary also adopts this view to the extent of saying that "there seems a strong probability that the latter part of the name has been omitted by copyists at some very early period." Keil's remark, however, seems decisive: "Von Raumer has properly opposed this conclusion, since Kirjath-jearim is not merely reckoned as one of the cities of Judah in chap. xv. 60, but in chap. xviii. 14 is expressly called the city of the children of Judah." Knobel supposes that Kirjath may be *Kerteh*, west of Jerusalem, while Crosby mentions *Khirbet el-Kuta*, near Gibeah.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE PARAGRAPHS.*

### Verse 1.—The Ark finding a Resting-place in "the Place of Rest."

There can be little doubt but that the instruction to set up the tabernacle at Shiloh came from Jehovah Himself. This might be sufficiently clear from Deut. xii. 5 and xxvi. 2, but it is made still more plain by the same words in Josh. ix. 27. Not only Moses, but Joshua also, recognised it as the Divine will that the Lord

Himself should choose the place in which He would put His name. God would have the tabernacle more permanently erected before the division of the land was completed; He would also have it set up *at Shiloh*, and thus make His resting-place, and the place where Israel should find rest spiritually, in a city whose very name was "rest" or "tranquillity."

**I. The time of setting up the ark.** 1. *It was after a long period of wandering.* The stay in Egypt had been only "a sojourn." To that long sojourn had succeeded the forty years' wandering in the wilderness. Finally, to the wanderings in the wilderness there had been added seven years of marching and counter-marching over the land of Canaan itself. How grateful to many must have been this act of setting up the tabernacle at Shiloh! It was the initial step towards having a fixed home for themselves. 2. *It was after severe and prolonged conflict.* The strife which began at the overthrow of Sihon and Og, which took on new features at the fall of Jericho, and which, for the time being, was consummated in the destruction of the hosts of Jabin and the cities of northern Canaan, had been an arduous and bitter work. Many of the Israelites themselves may have fallen, although the history is singularly silent on this point, excepting that we are told, in connection with the defeat before Ai, that "the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men." Any way, the setting up of the tabernacle must have been looked upon as indicating a blessed rest from the terrible conflicts of the past. The rest was not final and permanent, for there remained yet very much land to be possessed; yet, in the main, Canaan was won when the ark was thus set up at Shiloh. Such is the sense of rest when Christ is enthroned in the hearts of men individually. The peace which He gives stands in sweet contrast to the strife of the conscience with sin and unbelief. To believe in Him is not utter cessation from conflict, but it is the beginning of such a cessation to every man who is found faithful. 3. *It was as the Israelites were about to enter upon their own personal inheritance.* Ere most of them found a home, they set up together the tabernacle of the Lord. The way with many is to arrange business and domestic matters first, and to take afterwards, as they may find it, the religious provision of the neighbourhood in which they may have determined to settle. When starting, or starting afresh in life, they give no place whatever to religious considerations. Many ignore their spiritual wants altogether, even when they find nigh at hand facilities for the worship and service of God. There are not a few who might learn much from this ancient example.

**II. The place of setting up the ark.** 1. *It was nearly in the centre of the land.* It was as though Divine forethought would place the means of worship within reach of all the people, and render the service of the Lord as little burdensome as possible. Of Israel it should be said, "God is *in the midst of her*; she shall not be moved." 2. *It was in one of the safest parts of the land.* "And," or "For the land was subdued before them." Calvin remarks that the ark was stationed at Shiloh "because it was a completely subjugated place, and safe from all external violence and injury. For it behoved to be the special care of the Israelites to prevent its exposure to sudden assault. No doubt the hand of God would have been stretched out to ward off attacks of the enemy from any quarter; still, however, though God dwelt among them, they were to be regarded as its guardians and attendants." As God kept the ark, so does He keep His truth and the honour of His name among men now. He means us to feel them to be our trust. As with the ark, *God* keeps the truth, but He keeps it by men. We are to feel responsible for making it as secure as possible. We are "put in trust with the gospel." 3. *It was in what also became the place of judgment.* Here the claims of the wronged were heard. They can be heard nowhere so well as in the presence of the God of compassion and truth. Of the place where the Lord dwells, it should ever be said, "There are set thrones of judgment." (Cf. also Deut. xvii. 9; 2 Chron. xix. 8.)

**III. The time and place of setting up the ark, in their joint significance.**

After a long period of wandering and warfare, the ark was set up in a place, the very name of which pointed to tranquillity and rest. As this is the first time that Shiloh is mentioned in the Scriptures as the name of a city, it is possible that the name may have been given to the place on this occasion. This makes no difference to the significance of erecting the ark of rest in the city of rest. If the place was selected because it had previously borne this name, the circumstance is full of meaning; if, on the other hand, when it was determined to set up the tabernacle in this place, some old name was exchanged for the word "Shiloh," the significance of such a conjunction is, perhaps, still more emphatic. 1. *God dwells only where men rest.* He makes His abode where men are at peace with Himself and at peace with each other. Where men rest in Him, there He tabernacles. 2. *Men rest only where God dwells.* There was only one Shiloh in Israel, and that was found in the place where Jehovah sat between the cherubim. With us, the accidents of description are changed, but the facts remain. Peace is only found through Him who said, "My peace I leave with you;" and where Christ dwells, surrounding enemies are not able to break the peace of His people. It is said that in the catacombs of Rome, one of the epitaphs very frequently met with is this, "*In Christo, in pace.*" Notwithstanding all the horrors of the Roman persecution, it remained true—"in Christ, in peace." It has always been thus: God dwells where men rest, and men rest where God dwells. "In Salem" (= "peace") "is His tabernacle;" and it is there that His people learn to sing, "Oh, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him."

**IV. The period of the ark's continuance at Shiloh, and the cause of its removal.** The ark probably remained at Shiloh for rather more than three hundred years. At the end of this period the place was so polluted by the sins of Eli's sons, that the Lord forsook it for ever. Though not in name, yet no less actually, Shiloh passed into Ichabod. Dean Stanley remarks: "Shiloh is so utterly featureless, that, had it not been for the preservation of its name (*Seilûn*), and for the extreme precision with which its situation is described in the book of Judges (chap. xxi. 19), the spot could never have been identified; and, indeed, from the time of Jerome till the year 1838, its real site was completely forgotten, and its name was transferred to that commanding height of Gibeon, which a later age naturally conceived to be a more congenial spot for the sacred place, where for so many centuries was 'the tent which He had pitched among men,'—

> 'Our living Dread, who dwells
> In Silo, His bright sanctuary.'"

So complete was the desolation which God wrought, when Israel abandoned those essential conditions of piety which were necessary for His dwelling-place. Only they who walk with God in spirit, find God abiding with them. Sin, of any kind, is the sign for His departure. It may be sin of irreverence, impurity, and covetous injustice, as at Shiloh; or, as at Jerusalem in after generations, men may stand in haughty ecclesiastical pride, and cry, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these;" finding presently that they have only the temple, and no Lord at all, excepting one who jealously responds, "Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. . . . Therefore will I do to this house as I have done to Shiloh" (cf. Jer. vii.). Only they who keep the words of the Father, know the abiding presence of the Father (John xiv. 23). All others He forsakes. Even many years of past mercy and manifested glory fail to secure His continued stay. When His people ignore His commandments, where He once wrote "Shiloh," He henceforth writes "Ichabod."

Verse 1, with Numb. x. 33, and Josh. vi. 6—7.—"THE ARK: GOD OUR GUIDE, DEFENCE, AND REST."

**I. "Is human life a journey? Place it under the guidance of God. Let 'the**

Lord God go before you to search you out a place to pitch your tents in.' That is the significance of the scene at Sinai.

II. "Is human life a conflict? Let the Lord God be your sword and shield. He hath provided an armour all complete, from head to foot, and offers Himself to you as the 'Captain of your salvation.' That is the significance of the scene at Jericho.

III. "Is human life a sojourn? Let the Lord God prescribe where it shall be spent, and let His rest give the appointed home all purity and peace. That is the significance of the scene at Shiloh.

"How holy must that house be which the Lord hath chosen for me! As I cross its threshold, nothing unclean is to enter; as I depart from it for duty, nothing sinful is to fill my spirit. That house that is purchased by the price of iniquity is not allotted by the Lord. That house that is the scene of lust, of selfishness, of unkindness, is held by a man who has clean forgotten whose tenant he is. That house that is the abode of disorder and strife violates all the covenants on which it is held. But that house that has its altar and its Bible, by which each inmate is ever reminded of the Lord before whom its lot of assignment was taken, is a house that will ever derive peace, rest, and strength from the tabernacle of the Lord at Shiloh. These houses are hard by each other; their inmates are no strangers to each other. Man goes to the Lord's house, and the Lord goes to man's house: man with his homage, and penitence, and trust, and prayer, the Lord with His benediction in all manifold grace." [*G. B. Johnson, Edgbaston.*]

Verse 3.—Man's Slowness in Possessing God's Gifts.

1. God's commandments as a rich inheritance. The Israelites had been solemnly charged to go up and possess the land, and to drive out the Canaanites utterly. Both Moses and Joshua had repeatedly urged this as the commandment of the Lord. Thus, in this case, to obey the Divine precepts was also to enter upon a rich inheritance. It is ever the same with all who are faithful to the words of God. To obey is to inherit. To obey continually is to inherit largely. Some of the commandments of God are of a negative character, while others are positive; some tell us of things which we must not do, and others of things which we are to do. Look at the effect of obedience in each case. 1. *Such commandments as forbid sins tend to preserve us from moral and spiritual destitution.* He who does the things which he ought not to do hastens to spiritual bankruptcy at a pace proportionate to the rapidity of his transgressions. Take, for instance, the ten commandments of the moral law, which are mostly negative. To have many gods is to be without God altogether. To worship graven images is to find them only graven, and only images, in the hour of real necessity. To take the name of the Lord thoughtlessly upon our lips, is to find that its sacred and mysterious power has fled from our hearts. To violate the day of rest is to need rest all the week. To dishonour parents is to become insolvent in manhood and womanhood. To kill is to die, and that before we so much as lift a hand to slay; for he that hateth is a murderer, and no murderer hath life. To commit adultery is to wrong ourselves even more than others. To steal is to lose more within than we can get without. To slander others is to lose self-respect even more than we shew disrespect. Finally, to covet what is another's is to forfeit the generosity and kindness and peace which might still have remained our own. The man who does that which God forbids is continually forfeiting the very capital which God would have him use so as to gain a larger inheritance. He is living on his principal. He is spending himself. 2. *Such commandments as enjoin duties always tend to an increase of possessions.* The inheritance which comes from obeying (*a*) God's commandments to believe; (*b*) His commandments to be holy; (*c*) His commandments to worship; (*d*) His commandments to work (cf. remarks on page 254).

**II. Man's slowness in possessing this inheritance.** "How long are ye slack?" *etc.* We see here:—1. *Men on whose behalf God had long wrought by wonderful miracles, slothfully waiting when the miracles ceased.* For forty-seven or eight years God had been working miraculously for the Israelites. From the time of the ten plagues in Egypt to the battle in which the day had been so wonderfully prolonged, God had wrought great wonders for His people. He had brought them into the land with "a high hand and an outstretched arm." It is not a little significant, when we see this indolence and inactivity following such marvellous interposition. There is a place in the minds of men where miracles exhaust themselves. They no longer work faith, but inaction. Those who are continually seeking for the *manifest* interposition of God should remember that nothing which men have ever witnessed seems so conspicuously to have failed as the evidently supernatural. It was the men for whom the waters of the earth had parted, for whom the skies for many years had rained daily bread, before whom solid walls had fallen down, and on whose behalf the sun had stayed his setting, who were so slack to go up and possess the land to which these and many other wonders had led them. It was after witnessing for three years and a half the gracious miracles of Christ, that the multitudes at Jerusalem were turned by their exasperated leaders into a raging mob, hoarsely shouting to the Roman Governor concerning that same Jesus, "Crucify Him; Crucify Him." 2. *Men indolently and sinfully failing to use God's great mercies, through treating them as tiresome duties to be done.* They thought of the work which yet remained as a task, and regarding it in that light, found little heart to undertake it. They needed love, and thus wanted also the alacrity of love. Christ says to us each, "Occupy till I come." He who does not think highly of Christ's gift, and who does not love to occupy for Christ's sake, will weary himself with his Lord's commandment, instead of finding it a joyful possession. He who thought his Lord an austere man, and hid his talent in the earth, was afraid notwithstanding that it was hidden, and presently passed from fear to judgment.

**III. Man's inheritance curtailed through his inactivity.** The slothfulness of the Israelites was ultimately the cause of many sorrows. 1. *Much of the land was never possessed at all.* When we miss the opportunities which God makes for us, it is not an easy work to make fresh opportunities ourselves. 2. *The land which was inherited was made insecure by that which was left in the possession of enemies.* The Philistines, especially, became grievous oppressors of the Israelites for many years. As God had forewarned His people, the enemies whom they spared became as "thorns in their sides" (Numb. xxxiii. 55). The soldier who leaves unreduced a strong fortress in his rear, exposes himself to danger. The Christian who deliberately passes by an imperative commandment of God is still more unwise. A large inheritance and great safety go only with full and loving obedience.

Verses 1—3.—ISRAEL AT SHILOH.

"1. God brings men to Shiloh that He may set them to work. When the sinner comes to Christ, he enters into 'peace' and 'rest,' and yet he is not suffered to remain idle. We are saved by grace, without works; but we are also saved by grace *to work*, and the great work set before us is the sanctification of our souls and the service of our generation. Only through the doing of this work shall we enter upon our inheritance.

"2. Nothing is so displeasing to God as slackness on our part to go up and possess His gifts." [*Dr. Wm. Taylor.*]

Verses 5—7.—THE LOT OF GOD, AND THE SURVEY OF MEN.

**I. The choice of God cannot be corrected by the survey of men.** Judah, Manasseh, and Ephraim were still to abide in the position already indicated by the lots previously drawn. It is true that great alterations were to be made

in the *extent* of some of these lots, but no alteration was to be made in the general situation. The work of men in respect to these three tribes had to be corrected by the survey; the arrangement, so far as it was God's, was to remain untouched (cf. remarks on chap. xiv. 2, pp. 250, 252). God makes no mistakes. He had surveyed the land long before these representatives of the tribes undertook the work. Our most minute investigations can correct no determination which is of the Lord.

**II. The choice of God cannot be omitted because of the survey of men.** After the work of the surveyors was completed, they were to bring the description to Joshua, that he might "cast lots for them before the Lord" (ver. 6). Josephus (*Ant.* v. 1. 21) speaks of the men sent out as "geometricians who could not easily fail of knowing the truth, on account of their skill," and further says, they returned to Joshua "in the seventh month." Even if they were as skilled as some think, and if they took upwards of six months for their task, the appeal to the Lord for His guidance was as necessary as ever. Our utmost care can never render us independent of prayer.

**III. The choice of God and the survey of men work together.** 1. *Divine guidance is independent of the investigation of men.* God did not need the survey to help Him in determining on His selection. We cannot do without His work, but He does not rest on ours. 2. *Divine guidance does not clash with the investigation of men.* God ever leaves something for us to do. A loving father does the difficult part of a work for his child. It would be less trouble to the father to complete it entirely. The easy parts left to the child would take the father but a few moments to do, whereas the child requires watching and helping for hours, and even then goes far to spoil what has been done for him. For all that, a wise and patient father says, Though this detains me, it is good for my child. God leaves us something to do, much in this spirit. It is not that we can improve or even supplement His work; it is through the kindness that would not have us children always that we are found "labourers together with God." Our investigation does not suppose so much to be subtracted from omniscience; our labour is never a fraction which is necessary to make omnipotence perfect. 3. *Divine guidance is made known through the investigation of men.* It is as we inspect, and measure, and plan, that the Lord's selection for us becomes comprehensible and plain. Before the survey, the lot notwithstanding, Judah had regarded as its own the whole inheritance of Simeon. It is just where our most careful labours end that we best begin to understand what is the meaning of God.

**IV. The choice of God is never needed to correct or to supplement His own previous arrangements.** Verse 7. The Levites were still to find their inheritance in the Lord God of Israel. The two and a half tribes east of Jordan were to continue in their lots, according to God's former arrangement through Moses. Judah and the children of Joseph were also in their right place. The casting of lots at Shiloh was no amended edition of God's previous selection. "God is not a man, that He should repent." Few things are more imposing than this unbending and unhesitating purpose of God. Creation is one, and has no contradictions. Nature lies in a straight line, broken nowhere by halting purposes, and free everywhere from disfiguring patches. In the kingdom of grace it is emphatically the same. From the offerings of Abel and the altars of Abraham to the cross of Calvary, there is but one voice from heaven crying out to the sons of men, and that is ever saying, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." God's walk through the universe, during all the ages, is a straight path. The only lane in this world which "has no turning" is the way trodden by the feet of the God of infinite wisdom and justice and love.

Verses 8—10.—Dangerous Work and Divine Protection.

**I. Men sent on a dangerous service for the people of God, and protected by God.**

**II. Men prospered by God, and successfully accomplishing their work.**
**III. Men doing their utmost to shed light on a difficult task, and needing the guidance of God notwithstanding.**

THE DANGER TO WHICH THE SURVEYORS WERE EXPOSED.—"Nothing seems more incongruous than to send twenty-one men, who were not only to pass directly through a hostile country, but to trace it through all its various windings and turnings, so as not to leave a single corner unexamined, to calculate its length and breadth, and even make due allowance for its inequalities. Every person whom they happened to meet must readily have suspected who they were, and for what reason they had been employed on this expedition. In short, no return lay open for them except through a thousand deaths. Assuredly they would not have encountered so much danger from blind and irrational impulse, nor would Joshua have exposed them to such manifest danger had they not been aware that all those nations, struck with terror from heaven, desired nothing so much as peace. For although they hated the children of Israel, still, having been subdued by so many overthrows, they did not dare to move a finger against them, and thus the surveyors proceeded in safety as through a peaceful territory, either under the pretext of trading, or as harmless strangers passing on their way. It is also possible that they arranged themselves in different parties, and thus made the journey more secretly. It is certain, indeed, that there was only one source from which they could have derived all this courage and confidence, from trusting under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty, and thus having no fear of blind and stupid men. Hence the praise here bestowed on their ready will." [*Calvin.*]

Verses 9, 10.—THE DESCRIPTION OF OUR HEAVENLY INHERITANCE.—"The heavenly Canaan is described to us in a book, the book of the Scriptures, and there is in it a record of mansions and portions sufficient for all God's spiritual Israel. Christ is our Joshua that divides it to us; on Him we must attend, and "to Him we must apply ourselves for an inheritance with the saints in light (cf. John xiv. 2—6)." [*Matt. Henry.*]

Verses 11—28.—THE SITUATION OF THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN.

In the matter of numbers, the tribe of Benjamin was amongst the smallest in Israel. As concerning the order of birth, Benjamin was the youngest of the twelve sons of Jacob. These two things, the latter of them especially, may go far to account for the considerate sympathy which was repeatedly shewn towards "little Benjamin," who, after the slaughter recorded in Judges xxi., became known as the "smallest of the tribes of Israel" (1 Sam. ix. 21; Ps. lxviii. 27). Whether the name Benjamin be taken into account, or the gentle sympathy with which the tribe was often regarded be thought of, the Scripture history repeatedly leaves the impression that they were a favoured people in Israel. Even in the dark page of sin and slaughter already referred to there are traces of the same feeling: it is shewn, on the one hand, in the haughty demeanour of the "spoiled children" who alone recklessly set themselves in array against the overwhelming thousands of the kingdom; and, on the other hand, in the tearful inquiry of the other tribes before the Lord, in the half-hearted character of the earlier attacks, as though the avengers were at first too pitiful to smite firmly, and in the way in which the people after the victory "repented them for Benjamin their brother, and said, There is one tribe cut off from Israel this day." This feeling of affectionate interest in the children of Jacob's youngest son is not only shewn towards them by their brethren, but is conspicuously marked in the inspired blessing of Moses the man of God, "Of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders."

The following interesting features, according so well with the spirit and language of this blessing, may be noticed in regard to the situation of the territory of the tribe:—

1. The people had their inheritance near to the place where Benjamin, their father, was born, and where his mother Rachel died and was buried. The southern boundary of the tribe could not, at most, have been more than five or six miles from the spot (Gen. xxxv. 16, 19), and probably included the actual site of Rachel's tomb (cf. ver. 25; 1 Sam. x. 2). 2. The inheritance of the tribe was next to that of the house of Joseph, Benjamin's "own and only brother." 3. From the powerful and dreaded Philistines, and other enemies, it had the strong tribe of Judah to defend it on the south, and the warlike Danites to shield it on the west. 4. It was situated in a district having very great advantages for the purposes of defensive warfare (cf. Stanley's Sinai and Palestine, on "The Heights and the Passes of Benjamin," pp. 199—214). 5. It was immediately south of Shiloh, where, during those earlier centuries of the national history, God tabernacled with His people, and immediately north of Jerusalem, which was given to the Benjamites as a part of their possession. Thus this highly favoured tribe "dwelt safely by Jehovah," and the Lord "covered him all the day long," and he "dwelt between the shoulders" of Deity.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *THE INHERITANCE OF THE REMAINING TRIBES.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—1—9. THE INHERITANCE OF SIMEON.—The cities of this tribe have already been noticed under chap. xv. 26—32. 42. With the exception of Ether and Ashan, which were in the Shephelah, they were all situated in the south land of Judah, though it is not certain that even the larger group formed a continuous district. This accords with the prophecy of Jacob (Gen. xlix. 7). Another list of the cities of Simeon is given in 1 Chron. iv. 28—32. There Sheba seems merged in Beer-sheba, making the number of cities thirteen, as stated in ver. 6. In the days of Hezekiah, Simeon annexed more territory to the south (1 Chron. iv. 39—43). 1. **The second lot**] *i.e.*, the second lot taken after the removal to Shiloh. 4. **Bethul**] Called "Bethuel" in the list in Chronicles, and probably the same as "Chesil," in chap. xv. 30. 5. **Bethmarcaboth and Hazar-susah**] These are thought to be the same as "Madmannah and Sausannah," in chap. xv. 31. 6. **Thirteen cities**] Fourteen are named here, but only thirteen in the verses in Chronicles. See the remark above. 8. **Ramath of the south**] Called "Ramoth" in 1 Sam. xxx. 27. The *pl.* form employed in the latter passage seems to indicate at least two or three of these lofty places, thus called "*heights of the Negeb*," or "*heights of the south*," of which Baalath-beer (= "*having a well*") may have been one. In 1 Chron. iv. 33, Ramath is not named, and from the way in which it is mentioned here, without the conjunction, both names may have belonged to the same place, which was possibly the principal of these Ramoth, or heights, of the Negeb. The "Bealoth," in chap. xv. 24, suggests that the name Baal was also used sometimes for this small group of two or three cities or villages on these hills of the south land.

10—16. THE INHERITANCE OF ZEBULUN.—Jacob and Moses had spoken of Zebulun as dwelling "at the haven of the sea," and as being enriched by "the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand." Josephus (*Ant.* v. 1—22) says that "Zebulun's lot included the land which lay as far as the Lake of Genesareth, and that which belonged to Carmel and the sea." If the territory of the Manassites touched upon that of the tribe of Asher (cf. on chap. xvii. 10), unless in some detached way, the land of Zebulun could not have extended continuously to the Mediterranean. It is possible that there may have been a portion of the sea-coast south of Cape Carmel possessed by Zebulun, although slightly disconnected from the main territory of the tribe by some narrow tongue of land near to Jokneam, where the inheritance of Manasseh "met together in Asher on the north." The prophecies of Jacob and Moses, however, may not have been fulfilled till some later period. 10. **Sarid**] "All that can be gathered of its position is that it lay to the west of Chisloth-Tabor (ver. 12)." [*Smith's Bib. Dict.*] 11. **Maralah, *etc.***] "Maralah and Dabbesheth must both have been upon the east or south-east of Jokneam. Dabbesheth signifies *a camel's hump* (Isa. xxx. 6), and Masius conjectures, with great probability, that the city received its name ipso Carmeli gibbo, like the town of Gamala, which, according to Josephus, was so called from the resemblance borne by the hill, upon which it stood, to a camel." [*Keil.*] 12. **Chisloth-tabor**] = "*The flanks of*

*Tabor*." It is supposed to be now identified in *Iksâl*, about two and a half miles to the west of Mount Tabor. **Daberath**] Called Dabareh in chap. i. 28, and belonging to Issachar, the frontier line leaving it just within the territory of that tribe. It is now *Deburieh*. **Japhia**] Thought to be the modern *Jâfa*, about two miles to the south of Nazareth. 13. **Gittah-hepher**] Otherwise written Gath-hepher. This was the birthplace of Jonah (2 Kings xiv. 25), and is supposed to be the present *el-Meshad*, five miles N.E. of Nazareth. **Goeth out to Remmon-methoar to Neah**] *Heb.* = "*goeth out to Rimmon which is assigned* (lit., marked off) *to Neah*." Robinson finds Rimmon in *Rummanneh*, about seven miles north of Nazareth. Neah has not been identified. 14. **Compassed it on the north side to Hannathon**] Meaning that the border thus turned round Neah on the north side, and went thence to Hannathon, now *Kana el-Jelil*, about nine miles north of Nazareth, and, according to Dr. Robinson, probably the Cana of our Lord's first miracle. **Jiphthah-el**] = "*God opens*." Dr. Robinson suggested that *Jiphthah-el* is identical with Jotapata, now *Jefat*, a village in the mountains of Galilee, the valley being the *Wady Abilin*. 15. **And Kattath**, *etc.*] This verse is evidently incomplete. The fourteenth verse closes the definition of the boundaries; the next proceeds with the names of the cities, and irrelevantly begins with the copulative. The cities are said to be twelve in number, whereas only five are mentioned. Keil's argument for the omission of seven names of cities between vers. 14, 15, seems conclusive. Kattath is not known. Nahallal is differently spelt in chap. xxi. 35, and again in Judges i. 30. For Shimron, cf. on chap. xi. 1. Idalah is unknown. Bethlehem has been identified in *Beit-lahm*, about six miles to the west of Nazareth. Some think that Ibzan was a native of this place, rather than of Bethlehem of Judah (cf. Judg. xii. 8, *marg.*).

17—23. THE INHERITANCE OF ISSACHAR.—"The borders of the tribe of Issachar are not particularly noted by the author, having been given by him in connection with the other tribes, except the eastern part of the north border and the east border (ver. 22)." [*Fay.*] Several of the cities within the territory of Issachar were given to the half-tribe of Manasseh. 18. **Jezreel**] Famous in connection with Ahab and Naboth. Now *Zerin*. **Chesulloth**] = "The flanks," or "loins." Though this name is almost identical with the "Chisloth" of ver. 12, it seems hasty to conclude with Gesenius and others that they were the same place. The very character of the name suggests the probability of its reduplication, as even the same mountain might have "flanks" on either side, and more than one place on the same side which might appropriately bear the appellation. As Chesulloth is wanted to complete these sixteen cities of Issachar, it must be held, though unknown, to have been distinct from Chisloth-tabor, which was on the border of Zebulun, and probably belonged to that tribe. Chesulloth, on the other hand, is mentioned between Jezreel and Shunem, and should probably be sought six or seven miles south of Mount Tabor. **Shunem**] Mentioned by Eusebius and Jerome as *Sulem*, five miles south of Tabor; now *Solam*, "a village on the S.W. flank of *Jebel Duhy*, three miles north of Jezreel" [cf. *Smith's Bib. Dict.*] 19. **Haphraim**] Possibly *el-'Afûleh*, about two miles west of *Solam*. Little or nothing is known of the remaining places in this and the two following verses, excepting En-gannim, which is probably the modern *Jenîn*, and which was given to the Gershonite Levites (chap. xxi. 29). 22. **The coast reacheth to Tabor**] "The border struck Tabor," *etc.* "In this the eastern part of the north border is given. The western point of beginning was Tabor, here probably not the mountain of this name, but a city lying on this mountain (Knobel and Keil), which was given to the Levites (1 Chron. vi. 62)." [*Fay.*] Of the remaining two of these sixteen cities little is known, but Beth-shemesh is thought to be *Bessum*.

24—31. THE INHERITANCE OF ASHER.—It was said of Asher, "His bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties" (Gen. xlix. 20); and again, "Let him dip his foot in oil" (Deut. xxxiii. 24). In fulfilment of these predictions the tribe received its portion in the rich territory bordering on the Mediterranean, in the N.W. of Palestine. Furrer, as quoted by Fay, says, "Even yet there are in that region ancient olive trees, large gardens with all kinds of southern fruit trees, and green corn fields. From the Franciscan cloister at Accho, the eye sweeps eastward over the wide, fertile, grassy plains up to the mountains of Galilee." 25. **Helkath**, *etc.*] Of the two cities first named nothing is known. Beten is said by Eusebius to have been eight miles east of Ptolemais, and to have been called, in his time, *Bebeten*. 26. **Alammelech**, *etc.*] "The name is preserved in the *Wady el-Malek*, which empties itself into the Kishon from the north-east." [*Fay.*] **Shihor-libnath**] "According to the opinion of J. D. Michaelis, '*the river of glass*,' *i.e.*, Belus, from the sand of which glass was first made by the Phœnicians." [*Gesenius.*] 27. **Beth-dagon**, *etc.*] Little or nothing is known of the places named in this verse, excepting Cabul, which is still called *Kabûl*, and, according to Robinson, lies eight or nine miles east of *Akka*. If the twenty cities which Solomon gave to Hiram (1 Kings ix. 11—13) lay in this neighbourhood, and included this city, Hiram would have found his contemptuous name ready-made, and likewise an apparent reason for applying it to the district, other than one of manifest and direct offence. The contempt would be half-concealed and half-exposed, as he probably wished it to be. This seems borne out by 1 Kings ix. 14, and by Hiram's continued transactions with Solomon. 28. **Hebron**, *etc.*] Hebron is otherwise spelt than the Hebron given to Caleb, and is thought to be the same as "Abdon" in chap. xxi. 30 and 1 Chron. vi. 74. Its site has not been found. Another Rehob is named in ver. 30, but both are unknown, though they must be distinguished from the Rehob to which the spies came, which was "as men come to Hamath" (Numb. xiii. 21),

near Laish, and "far from Zidon" (Judges xviii. 27, 28). **Kanah**] This seems by the text to have been next to Zidon, and, if so, must be *Ain Kana*, about eight miles to the S.E. of Zidon, rather than the modern *Kâna*, about the same distance S.E. of Tyre. **Unto great Zidon**] This, though allotted to Asher, was not taken (Judg. i. 31). 29. **Ramah**] "Two places of this name have been discovered in the district allotted to Asher; the one about three miles to the east, and the other about ten miles south-east of Tyre." [*Smith's Bib. Dict.*] Tyre has been briefly noticed under chap. xi. 8. Hosah and Ummah, in the next verse, are not known. **Achzib**] This is now *es-Zib*; it is about nine miles to the north of Ptolemais. **Aphek**] Formerly supposed to be *Afka*, but since disputed by Reland, Keil, and others, as too far to the north.

32—39. THE INHERITANCE OF NAPHTALI.—This tribe had its portion almost side by side with Asher in the northern part of the land. The river Jordan formed its boundary on the west. 33. **Heleph, *etc.***] All the places in this verse are unknown, saving that Zaanannim was near to Kedesh (cf. Judg. iv. 11). **Allon to Zaanannim**] *Heb.* = "*the oak by Zaanannim*." **Adami, Nekeb**] This should be read, Adami-nekeb = "*Adami of the hollow*," or "*of the pass*." 34. **Aznoth-tabor**] This city and Hukkok are also unknown. **Judah upon Jordan**] As there was a town of Asher in Manasseh (cf. on chap. xvii. 7), and possibly, some have thought, (?) a town of Zebulon in the tribe of Asher (ver. 27), so there seems to have been a town of Judah in the territory of Naphtali. It is possible that this name may have originated from Jair's connection with the tribe of Judah (cf. 1 Chron. ii. 5, 21—23), as supposed by von Raumer and others; but this can be regarded as little more than a guess. The name may have equally well arisen from any other similar or different association. 35. **Ziddim, Zer**] Neither place is known. **Hammath**] = "*Warm baths*." The Talmud places it one mile from Tiberias. Josephus (Wars of the Jews, iv. 1—3) calls it Emmaus, which he interprets as meaning "a warm bath." Probably Hammoth-dor (chap. xxi. 32), and Hammon (1 Chron. vi. 76), are the same place; but Hammath must not be confounded with Hamath in the Orontes valley. **Rakkath**] = "*A shore*." According to the Rabbins, the site on which Herod built Tiberias, on the coast of the sea of that name. **Chinnereth**] This place, also, gave its name, in earlier times, to the Lake of Gennesareth (cf. on chap. xi. 2), but the site of it is not known. It was doubtless situated on the shore of the inland sea named after it. **Adamah, *etc.***] Adamah is not known. Ramah was thought by Dr. Robinson to be *Ramah*, between *Akka* and the northern extremity of the lake. Hazor has been noticed under chap. xi. 1. It was, most likely, situated on "the high rocky slopes" near Lake Merom. "Hard by this height of Hazar, but commanding a nearer view of the plain, is the castle of Shubeibeh, the largest of its kind in the East, and equal in extent even to the pride of European castles at Heidelberg; built, as it would appear, in part by the Herodian princes, in part by Saracenic chiefs." [*Stanley's Sinai and Palestine.*] 37. **Kedesh, *etc.***] Kedesh has been identified by Dr. Robinson with *Kades*, ten miles north of Safed. Barak's residence was in this place (Judg. iv. 6). Little or nothing is known of the remaining places in this verse, or of those in the verse following.

40—48. THE INHERITANCE OF DAN.—The boundaries of this tribe, having already been defined in those of the neighbouring tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Judah, are not again particularly stated. 41. **Zorah, Eshtaol, and Ir-shemesh**] The first two of these cities are named in chap. xv. 33, as having been originally allotted to Judah, as was also the case with Ir-shemesh, otherwise called Beth-shemesh (cf. chap. xv. 10, xxi. 16), according to Keil. 42. **Shaalabbin**] Called Shaalbim in Judg. i. 35. It is now *Selbit*. **Ajalon**] Spelt sometimes, in A.V., Aijalon (chap. xxi. 24), and sometimes as here, but without any corresponding variation in the Heb. text. Now *Yâlo*. **Jethlah**] "According to Knobel, contained in the Wady Atallah west of *Yâlo*." [*Fay.*] It is not mentioned elsewhere. 43. **Elon**] Unknown. **Thimnathah**] = Timnah, for which, with Ekron, see on chap. xv. 10. 44. **Eltekeh and Gibbe-thon**] These cities were subsequently given to the Levites (chap. xxi. 23). The sites have not been identified. **Baalath**] This "is to be distinguished from Baala or Kirjath-jearim (chap. xv. 9). It was built by Solomon (1 Kings ix. 18), and, according to Josephus (*Ant.* viii. 6. 1), who writes it Βαλέθ, stood near to Gezer." [*Keil.*] 45. **Jehud, *etc.***] Jehud is thought to be the present *el-Yehudiyeh*, seven miles east of *Jaffa*; while Bene-berak is said to be *Ibn Abrak*, about half-way between Jaffa and the village first named. The site of Gath-rimmon is unknown, as is also the case with Me-jarkon and Rakkon, in the verse following. 46. **The border before Japho**] Meaning the sea coast over against Japho, or Joppa, the modern name of which is still *Jâfa*. The name is conspicuous in the books of Maccabees and in the Acts. 47. **And the coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them**] "And the border of the children of Dan *went out from them*, *i.e.*, beyond them, or beyond the inheritance allotted to them. Masius has correctly explained this somewhat unusual expression as follows: 'The Danites emigrated *beyond themselves*, *i.e.*, beyond the inheritance in which they were first placed by the Divine lot, and set out in search of other possessions.'" [*Keil.*] **Leshem**] Otherwise Laish, and subsequently the Dan forming the proverbial northern extremity of the kingdom. It is named again as Laish in Isa. x. 30. This verse gives another indication that the book of Joshua was not written till some years after Joshua's death. 50. **Timnath-serah in Mount Ephraim**] Called in Judg. ii. 9, "Timnath-heres," and said to be "on the north side of Mount Gaash." Dr. Eli Smith has proposed to identify Timnath with Tibneh, the ruins of which he has placed about six miles from *Jifna* on the way to

*Mejdel-Yaba.* Joshua's inheritance must of course be distinguished from the Timnath (or Thimnatha, ver. 43) of Samson. **51. These are the inheritances,** *etc.*] This concludes the account of the division of the land. As in chap. xiv. 1, at the beginning, so here, at the close of this work, the name of Eleazar takes precedence of that of Joshua.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE PARAGRAPHS.*

**Verses 49, 50.—The Personal Inheritance of Joshua.**

The inheritance of Joshua may be regarded as—

**I. The reward of the leader of the people, and yet the reward which was last given.** Not till the inheritance of each tribe was apportioned, did Joshua receive his. It should be ever thus. The tribe must take precedence of the man. The nation is to be considered before its rulers. The family is of more consequence than any one of its members. A man who is really a leader does not need to be told this. He who is foremost, indeed, knows how to be last of all. Ahab, who brings his people to ruin, turns his face to the wall, like a sulky child, and will eat no bread, because he cannot get Naboth's vineyard; Joshua, who brings the whole nation to rich possessions, waits, in the spirit of a true man, till others are satisfied, ere he thinks to ask even a home for himself.

**II. The reward of the greatest of the Israelites, and yet a small reward.** Timnath seems to have been an obscure place. It was not a famous city like Hebron, which fell to Caleb. When Joshua took it, Timnath even needed building; and, after Joshua's death, the city was famous only in its connection with him. He had founded it, and in its outskirts was his grave (chap. xxiv. 30): this alone gave the city its prominence in the history of the nation. The principal reward of true greatness is within, not without. Bricks and acres and wealth would be poor pay to a noble nature. Joshua's great reward was in the consciousness that he had spent his life in helping his fellow-men, that he had striven to glorify God, and that God had graciously accepted his work. Timnath was a necessity, and Joshua asked for it; his brethren gave it, and he gladly took it as an expression of their gratitude; but his real reward lay in the smile of God, in the approval of his own conscience, and in the visible joy which his labours had brought to others. Surely it will be thus even in heaven. The highest angel is not some winged creature with a taller crown, a bigger harp, and a few more outward decorations than his fellows; he is highest, who has best learned to serve others in self-denying lowliness. The Lord *of heaven* is He who is still like unto "a lamb as it had been slain." The acreage of Joshua's estate was far from being contained in Timnath. Much of his inheritance was in the approval of his own heart; still more in the approval of God. It is the man who thus lays up treasure in his heart towards God, who has learned to hide his riches "where thieves break not through nor steal." If heaven's wealth were like earth's, peradventure there would be thieves there also. Where the spoil is only a carcase, there will always be eagles.

**III. The reward asked by a good man, and thus a reward according to the word of the Lord.** "According to the word of the Lord, they gave him the city which he asked." Keil says: "We do not find any Divine injunction in the Pentateuch, to the effect that Joshua was to receive a particular share in the land of Canaan, as his own inheritance. Therefore many expositors suppose that the words, 'at the command of the Lord,' refer to an oracle of God, delivered through the high priest. But as Caleb had received a definite promise of this kind, which is not to be met with in a literal form in the Pentateuch (cf. chap. xiv. 9), we may properly assume that Joshua received a similar promise." Whether Joshua asked for Timnath, knowing God's mind before he asked, or whether God approved of Joshua's request after it was made, Joshua's heart was well in accord with the Divine will. He had not served for himself, but because he loved to serve. Such

a spirit ever makes beautiful the life which it animates. Thus when Bossuet quarrelled with Fenelon because the latter had advocated in his writings the doctrine of disinterested love to God; and when, through his great influence at the court of France and at Rome, Bossuet succeeded in getting his opponent's book condemned by the pope, the beautiful spirit shewn by Fenelon made it clear, to friends and foes alike, that he was a servant of God for something higher than the rewards of men. Declaring his submission to the papal decree, he at once wrote: "We shall find consolation, my dearest brethren, in what humbles us, provided that the ministry of the word, which we have received for your sanctification, be not enfeebled, and that, notwithstanding the humiliation of the pastor, the flock shall increase in grace before God." Perhaps it is hardly to be wondered at, that, impressed by the loftiness of the man whom influential persons induced him to condemn, the pope should have remarked to some immediately about him: "Fenelon is in fault for too great love of God; and his enemies are in fault for too little love of their neighbour." He who serves for the love of God, and in the joy of holy labour for men, has still a large estate left, even when his fellows are ungrateful.

IV. **The reward given to an aged and failing man, and yet a reward provoking new industry.** "And he built the city, and dwelt therein." Joshua was "old and stricken in years" (chap. xiii. 1) before the work of distribution began, yet this gift of his brethren did but serve to stimulate him to fresh zeal in this new direction. The man who had spent his life in building a nation, appropriately sets himself to terminate it in the work of building a city. The real worker must work till the end. The body may decay, but the spirit seems to tell of its own immortal youth to the very last. The great German dramatist said:

> "The world's unwithered countenance
> Is bright as on creation's day."

So the soul of a true man proclaims, as audibly as possible, its own immortal energy. He to whom a life of work has been a joy, has joy in work down to life's very close. The sight of the aged gets feeble, but not his faith; the hands and feet fail, but not the will; the power to help others decays, but love has no grey hairs, and knows no infirmity.

Verse 51, *last clause.*—THE INHERITANCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE SURE, THOUGH DELAYED.

Very much later, doubtless, than some of the people had expected, but at last, nevertheless, it could be written: "So they made an end of dividing the country." These words form an appropriate standpoint for wise and thoughtful retrospect. An immense interval of time, and a long succession of exciting and apparently conflicting events, lie stretched out between the time of God's covenant to give this land to the seed of Abraham (Gen. xv.), and its actual inheritance, the accomplishment of which is here for the first time proclaimed. This period of human sin and Divine mercy and patience is made the theme of song in Psalms cv.—cvii. Through what process, between the time of promise and the time of possession, was the inheritance brought about? The history shews us the following leading features:—

I. **Inheritance is not through human merit, but through God's grace and covenant.** 1. *The covenant did not originate in Abraham's personal worthiness.* God called him out of Haran (Gen. xii. 1—4), where he was probably an idolater (Josh. xxiv. 14). After Abraham had obeyed God's call, he was guilty of distrust of God, and of untruthfulness to men (Gen. xii. 10—20). It was "after these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram" (Gen. xv. 1). Moreover, we are distinctly told, even at this early stage, that God had respect, not to Abraham's personal holiness, but to his faith: "He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." Our worthiness is not the ground on which God's

promises originate. It is only through our faith in Christ that we are qualified to receive either the new covenant or the possessions which it guarantees. 2. *God's reason for making His covenant of inheritance is in no way founded on any appearances which might seem to indicate its fulfilment.* God said to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance, when they were but a few men in number, yea, very few, and strangers in it; when they went from one nation to another, and from one kingdom to another people" (Ps. cv. 8—13). 3. *God's reason for causing His people to inherit can be discovered only in His own love and grace and truth.* Throughout these intervening centuries the Israelites are continually seen sinning, and God forgiving. They forget the promise, He remembers it; they transgress, He pardons; they hanker after "the flesh-pots of Egypt," He entices them with words about the land overflowing with milk and honey; they often murmur, He is ever patient. The whole of the way, from Abraham to the completed division of the land, is a way of great grace. Such are the reasons for the inheritance of all whom God causes to possess. The old covenant or the new covenant, Canaan or heaven, it matters not which; the reasons of possession are in Him, not in us.

II. **The way to possession is through loss.** 1. *The Israelites came into their inheritance through losing it.* After receiving the promise that his seed should inherit Canaan, Abraham was driven down into Egypt by famine. The necessity thus laid upon the father proved to be a foreshadowing of God's way with the children. Joseph was sold into Egypt, and later on, compelled still by famine, Jacob and his remaining sons were driven thither also. The sojourn there presently became a bondage, lasting upwards of two hundred years. Thus, God's way of leading His people to inherit the land was by leading them out of the land altogether. Possession was to be through utter loss. Nor is this seemingly strange method to be looked upon as an accident. God purposed it, from the first (Gen. xv. 13). This method is full of deep design. God's way was a necessity. The only possible way for the Israelites to inherit the land was, apparently, by their being driven out of the land. Had they remained in Canaan, they would in all probability have intermarried with the Canaanites. It is no less likely that they would have been seduced to the then fast spreading idolatry, which ere they came back from Egypt, had so firmly established itself in the land. Had they remained in Palestine, and fallen into either of these snares, their subsequent inheritance of the territory, as a nation, would have been impossible. It may be said, There was idolatry in Egypt: would not that tempt them there as much as idolatry in Canaan? From this God graciously guarded them by their very condition in Egypt. They were made slaves. They were bitterly oppressed. The common affliction would bind them in a common sympathy. In their keen suffering, through hard service and the slaying of their male children, they would learn to hate the Egyptians and their gods together. Antipathies would be raised in them against idolatry generally. A common patriotism, in these children of the Promised Land, would be provoked by a common suffering. This, doubtless, was exactly what Divine wisdom intended. One of the strongest possible forces was at work, tending, in many ways, to bind them to each other and into the great clan of God, presently to be compassed on every hand by the surrounding nations of the heathen. The common deliverance at the Red Sea would only serve to deepen this carefully formed feeling, bursting out as it does in a common joy in the wonderful song of Moses. The mighty outpouring of passion there, with each other, for God, and against the heathen, is the vehement and first real expression of that Hebrew nationalism which God had been so carefully and surely creating, and which to this day still throbs so strongly in the Hebrew heart. The forty years' discipline in the wilderness would serve to bind the Israelites still closer, uniting them in a common fear of God, and in a general assurance that He could be trusted in all kinds of want and extremity. Thus they crossed the Jordan, bound together in spirit as one man, and strong in that

union both to conquer an idolatrous nation and abhor its idolatry. Humanly speaking no such feelings as these could have animated the young nation, had they remained in Canaan. God led them into their inheritance by causing them to forsake it utterly. The way into the promised possession was through the bitter bondage of Egypt and many years of sorrow in the wilderness. 2. *God's way to possession is still through loss.* (*a*) The way to peace with God is through fleeing from the contentment of carelessness. "The *fear* of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Men start for heaven by going into the sharp conviction that it may never be theirs. We journey towards the full assurance of God's forgiveness by giving up, in alarm, those easy assumptions of it, in which we once found rest through general and vague thoughts of Divine mercy. (*b*) The way to righteousness is through a rejection of our righteousness. To be holy indeed, we must enter into the awful knowledge of our own sinfulness. He who thought that he was, "touching the law, blameless," could hold the clothes of Stephen while others murdered him; the same man, counting all his good doings as dung, pressed indeed towards the mark of the heavenly calling. When Paul counted his gain loss, then, and not till then, he won the righteousness of his Saviour. (*c*) The way to life in Christ is by dying with Christ. It is he who cries, "I am crucified with Christ," who immediately adds, "Nevertheless I live." To be "born again" is to die. The way to our inheritance is by a cross, which seems to stand at the very beginning of our pilgrimage as the significant symbol of a journey of contradictions. The very Saviour of our life stands and cries to us, "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

**III. The way from loss to secure inheritance is by the power and patience and love of God.** 1. *The way from the bondage of Egypt to this division of the land affords one long view of Jehovah's mighty works.* The miracles which made Pharaoh let the people go never ceased till the people were ready to enter into the rest of possession. 2. *This way to inheritance was no less marked by Divine patience.* While God wrought mightily, the people murmured continually. On their part, the one thing which rose prominent above every other was sin; on His part was mercy which ever covered their transgressions. 3. *The wonders of Divine power, and the beauty of Divine patience, are alike seen as the outcome of Divine love.* God's love to the men—those men, and the men who should follow them, was the motive which underlay all. The miracles were not merely for a new nation to be called Israelites. The patience was not so much care over a pet scheme of Deity. God was loving men—loving all men, and seeking to save the world that was, and the world that would be, from the sin and ruin of idolatry.

**IV. Alternations from seeming possession to loss, and from loss to permanent inheritance, are God's way of leading men into habitual obedience and perpetual praise.** It was out of the magnitude of the Israelites' difficulties that they came to their wonderful deliverances, and it was in their great deliverances that they found the glowing fervour of those choice songs which they have left as such a noble legacy to the world. Their deferred hopes, their long-tried patience, their adverse journeyings, their mighty battles: all these led to ardent praise, and praise, in its turn, gave new strength. Battles are not pleasant, but we can have no victories without them. The smooth straight path may be trodden more easily and more quickly than the way which is rough, and steep, and winding; yet, after all, it is where the tourist is turned from a direct line of travel by high mountains, and wearied in his way by steep hills, that the landscape most delights him. The plain is easier for travelling, but it provokes little ardour. Otherwise than through the sense of their strength, "the mountains shall bring peace." The Christian pilgrim who travels rough places and rugged steeps may have more weariness than he who walks in "plain paths;" generally he also knows more of joy, and feels more of thankfulness and praise.

## CHAPTER XX.

### *THE CITIES OF REFUGE.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**2. Appoint out for you cities of refuge**] *Heb.* "**Appoint,**" **or** "**Give for you the cities of refuge.**" The article, which is omitted in A.V., points to the fact that God had already commanded these cities to be set apart, as the verse itself proceeds to state. Since the intimation in Exod. xxi. 13, and the instructions in Numb. xxxv., these cities were a well-recognised part of the constitution. The word rendered "refuge" is from the root *kâlat*, "to contract." "*to draw together;*" hence, "*to receive* a fugitive to oneself." [*Gesen.*] **3. Unawares and unwittingly**] *i.e.*, "*in ignorance,*" by mistake; "*inadvertently,*" by accident, without intention; perhaps, also, "*suddenly,*" "*impulsively,*" and thus without the "knowledge" which would have come had time been taken for thought. The repeated notion in the Hebrew words is very emphatic, coming to much the same thing as the negative of our English form, "with malice aforethought." This idea is fully expressed in Deut. iv. 42, "and hated him not in times past" (cf. Deut. xix. 4, 6, *marg.*). A man might be slain by mere accident, by carelessness, by the "mistake" of an avenger pursuing the wrong person, and thus committing murder "in ignorance;" or death might ensue from a sudden assault, in passion, when there was no intention to slay. For all, who might so take life, these cities were to be a refuge. But they were to afford no permanent refuge for the "wilful murderer;" he was to be taken even from the altar of sanctuary, and put to death (Exod. xxi. 14; 1 Kings ii. 28—34; 2 Kings xi. 15). **4. Shall stand at the entering of the gate, *etc.***] "This is not to be understood, as it is by Michaelis, as implying that the man was to stand outside the city gate, and there relate his cause to the elders, and that he was not to enter the city till they had declared him not guilty of premeditated murder; but *the gate* of the city means the forum, the public place of judgment in the city, where the elders were to hear and examine his statement." [*Keil.*] "The open space at the gate of Eastern cities was like the Greek *agora* and the Roman *forum*, the usual place of public resort; hence the well-known phrase 'judges within thy gates'" [*Groser*]. **6. Until the death of the high priest**] It is added in Numb. xxxv. 25, "which was anointed with the holy oil." Thus, as Keil points out, the liberation was made to be dependent on the death of the anointed "mediator and representative of the people in the presence of God." The stress laid on the official position of the high priest by this reference to the anointing oil seems clearly intended to prefigure the corresponding "deliverance of the captives," which is effected by the death of the anointed Saviour. **7. And they appointed**] *Marg.*, "**sanctified.**" These cities were consecrated, as holy, to the sacred work of preserving life. Hence, only Levitical cities were chosen. Life was to be thus preserved in connection with religion Whether fleeing to the altar of sanctuary or the city of sanctuary, the Israelites were to learn to cry, "God is a refuge for us." **Kadesh**] "Sanctuary," a deriv. from the same root as the word just noticed. Kedesh is to be distinguished from the city of this name in the south of Judah (chap. xv. 23), and likewise from the Kedesh of the Gershonite Levites, in Issachar (cf. 1 Chron. vi. 72, 76), though this Kedesh of Naphtali was given to the same Levitical family. **Shechem . . . and Hebron**] It will be seen that the three cities of refuge on the west of Jordan, thus chosen, were as conveniently placed as possible. Kedesh was not in the extreme north, nor Hebron in the extreme south, while Shechem was in the very midst of the land; each city, also, lay in a good central position as between the line of the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. **8. On the other side Jordan**] Moses had already appointed the three cities for the eastern territory (Deut. iv. 41—43). **Bezer**] called by the LXX. and Vulg. "*Bosor.*" From 1 Chron. vi. 78, we learn that it was given to the Merarites, and that it was opposite to Jericho. **Ramoth in Gilead**] So also in Deut. iv. 43; 1 Kings xxii. 3; elsewhere Ramoth-Gilead. Probably identical with the Ramath-Mizpeh of chap. xiii. 26. **Golan**] = "exile." According to Josephus, as quoted by Gesenius, it was near to the sea of Galilee, and gave its name to the region afterwards known as Gaulanitis, now *Jaulân.* **9. Until he stood before the congregation**] No homicide who could reach one of these cities was to be delivered up till he had obtained a hearing; those innocent of wilful murder were to be afforded an asylum in the city, till the death of the high priest rendered them free to depart; but those who were guilty of taking life deliberately, after this had been so decided, were given over to the avenger of blood.

### *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1—6.

#### THE CUSTOM OF BLOOD-REVENGE.

The custom of blood-revenge is undoubtedly very ancient among other nations than that of the Jews. The Arabs, the Persians, the Druses of Syria, the Abyssinians, the Circassians, and others, have long recognised this "law of blood," which is said to remain in force even to the present day in certain parts of the

East. Mahomet legislated concerning it in the Koran, and there is ample evidence of its existence previous to his time. The *Asyla* of the ancient Greeks and Romans present both an extension and a modification of the practice; shewing its application to other matters than blood, and limiting its duration otherwise than by the measure of a life, as known among the Jews. Thus it is said: "The temple of Diana, at Ephesus, was a refuge for debtors, and the tomb of Theseus for slaves. In order to people Rome, a celebrated asylum was opened by Romulus, between the mounts Palatine and Capitoline, for all sorts of persons indiscriminately, fugitive slaves, debtors, and criminals of every kind. It had a temple dedicated to the god Asylæus. It was by this means, and with such inhabitants, that Thebes, Athens, and Rome were first stocked. We even read of Asyla at Lyons and Vienne, among the ancient Gauls; and some of the cities in Germany have preserved this right to the present century. On the medals of several ancient cities, particularly in Syria, we meet with the inscription ΑΣΥΛΟΙ, to which is added ΙΕΡΑΙ."—[*Lond. Encyc.* (1829), "*Asyla.*"]

Arguing from the ancient and widely spread character of this practice of establishing cities of refuge, many theological writers have assumed that Moses found the custom already existing among surrounding nations, and that, *because* it was so deeply rooted in society, God instructed Moses to regulate it rather than to suddenly attempt its abolition. Thus it is frequently regarded as something which God found existing and tolerated, rather than something solemnly chosen and deliberately enforced. It has even been placed on a level with polygamy, which God long suffered, but never approved. Such a view strangely overlooks the real origin of "blood-revenge." Instead of viewing it as a custom which the Jews adopted from barbarous nations around them, it is rather to be regarded as a practice which barbarous nations adopted from the Jews, and presently perverted. The real origin of the custom is as far back as in Gen. ix. 5, 6; and, rightly contemplated, is a solemn vindication of the sacredness of human life. It is by no means a cultivation of the spirit of a heathenish vengeance. Given that God's law said, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," how was that law to be carried out? At the time when it was given, there were no set places of judgment, and no selected judges; for men were not grouped in nations. There was no central authority around which the ever-dispersing tribes of Noah's house could gather. Then, the family was the nation, and the head of the family the ruler. The patriarchs were their own family priests, and their own family judges. If this law were to be carried out at all, it must be carried out by the family itself. An aged and infirm man would not be fit for the task of pursuing and doing justice on a murderer; hence the solemn task fell, in more general terms, on some one suitable among "the next of kin." The internal evidence of Scripture itself is altogether opposed to the superficial view of Divine toleration. Both among the Romans and Arabs the practice of ransoming even a wilful murderer was common. In the Koran special provision is made for thus settling such blood-feuds with "the price of blood." So far from tolerating the avenging of blood, God expressly enjoined by Moses that the wilful murderer was on no account to be suffered to escape. He was to be taken even from God's altar to be slain (Exod. xxi. 14), and ransom was strictly forbidden (Numb. xxxv. 31, 33). The remark made on this passage in the *Speaker's Commentary* justly estimates the superior morality of the Mosaic regulations: "The permission to make compensation for murders undoubtedly mitigates, in practice, the system of private retaliation; but it does so by sacrificing the principle which is the basis of that retaliation itself. Resting ultimately upon the law of God, that 'Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed,' it bids men rest content with a convenient evasion of that law, and converts the authority given to men to act as God's ministers, in taking life for life, into a warrant for enabling the kinsman of a murdered man to make gain out of his murder." Rightly interpreted, this custom of thus vindicating the blood of men wilfully slain was the

expression of God's justice, and no less an expression of the mercy which, using the best social machinery of the time, thus hastened to prevent the guilt of many would-be murderers, and to spare the lives of those who would have become their victims.

### The Sacredness of Human Life.

**I. The Lord's care for human life.** When we think of even a few of the things represented in the life of any individual man, we need not wonder that its Divine Maker has fenced it about with so jealous a care. 1. *It is life fashioned in the likeness of God.* He has made it "in His own image." The life of man stands alone in the earth. There is nothing near to it. There is nothing which approaches it. In communion with myriads of its kind, human life is a bearable and thus a grand solitude; isolate it from *such* communion, and though it might be surrounded by a very ark of other life—"two of every kind"—the solitude would be awful. Science, so called, may prattle as it will about "development;" it is enough that in his heart no man believes the small poetical story. Given that man is banished from his fellows, there is no "next-of-kin" whom he can take into his confidence. Darwin himself would pine away and die. In all terrestrial creation there is not a soul outside his own family to whom a man can talk, unless it be in some such imaginary intercourse as that in which a child holds fellowship with its doll. Put a man out from his own kind, and let him surround himself with what other life he may, he has to be talker and listener too. There is no other earthly life to which he can tell his secrets, or from which, in his keenest sorrows, he can beg a single tear of sympathy. But man can have fellowship with God. Every generation of men has found some men putting this to practical proof. Let scepticism sneer at prayer as it will, prayer has supported its millions. Men have turned to the great "likeness" of themselves above, and in their deepest sufferings they have "endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Man is made in the image of God: man feels it is so; God says it is so. What wonder can it be that God guards such a life so sacredly? To slay life such as this, is to insult it in its Divine representative above. To take the life of a man is to offer scorn to that life in God (Gen. ix. 6). Even the man-slaying beast was to be put to death when it thus, though unknowingly, did violence to life fashioned in the likeness of life's infinite Author (Gen. ix. 5; Exod. xxi. 28, 29). This was not a blind vengeance on the poor beast, but a lesson of such significance and worth for man, that, properly learned, it alone was of more value than the life of the heedless brute which had offended. 2. *It is life the taking of which is connected with much suffering.* The more exalted life is, the more it suffers in death. Intelligent life suffers more than brute life; it can think on the unkindness and hate which propose to slay it, and thus, even in a few moments of dying by violence, it can suffer murder in the sensitive mind as well as in the sensitive body. Thus the slain man suffers. The surviving relatives suffer proportionately. It is not merely the death but the murder of their loved one which such survivors mourn. God is very pitiful: He would spare men such woe. 3. *It is life capable of vast progress.* Being man, man can "develope." Give him time and tutors and discipline, there is no knowing whereunto his life may grow. The limit of what a man may become has not yet been discovered. There are such vast possibilities of penitence for the wicked, of generosity for the selfish, of knowledge for the ignorant, of usefulness for the useless, that he who would slay a fellow-man may well be held to be a foe to the universe. Only God knows what a life may become, and whether it is best that any particular life should be spared or taken. Who knows? the murderers that have been may have robbed the world of great philosophers, wise statesmen, generous philanthropists, useful writers, or saintly Christians. If the lives of men like John Howard, John Bunyan, John Milton, Isaac Newton, and William Wilberforce, had been taken just before the great works in which their names stand famous, how much the world would have lost! and how ignorant of the measure of that loss the

world would have been! 4. *Human life is life which has on earth only its beginning.* A man's life is only the portico to his individual eternity. If he be slain ere his life be given to God through Christ in penitence and faith, his eternity must be one of "destruction from the presence of the Lord." If the murderer had let the life alone, the great Husbandman might soon have made it fruitful unto life everlasting. To cut a man off in his sins is an act of awful responsibility. He who murders may murder not only a body, but a human soul.

II. **The merciful considerateness of the Lord for the man who might slay his fellow unintentionally.** Manslaughter may be through carelessness, more or less culpable, or through a passionate assault in which there is no design to slay. The cities of refuge were, apparently, intended to afford security even to those guilty of homicide in the more aggravated form. 1. *The unintentional manslayer was not to be put to death.* His carelessness might have been gross, or his passion very blameworthy indeed; but God graciously discerned between such and those who intended to kill. Only the wilful murderer was to be delivered up to death. 2. *The unintentional manslayer was to be imprisoned under pain of death.* For the guilt of his carelessness, or the sin of his passion, he might be deprived of his liberty for many years. He could only regain his freedom at the death of the high priest. Thus manslaughter was severely punished. 3. *It is possible that some intermediate penalty may have been inflicted in cases where the judges might deem it necessary.* These laws are possibly not the full law given to Moses. They deal with the main features of the questions which they touch, but not with all the details which might arise. Probably much was purposely left to the discretion of the judges. Hence criminal neglect or passion might be met with a punishment short of death, and yet the refugees thus guilty might be more severely dealt with than others.

III. **The purpose of the Lord that even the murderer should have a hearing.** The facilities offered for the permanent escape of the unintentional homicide were equally available for the temporary security of the man who had committed murder wilfully. 1. *The delay would afford the murderer time for repentance.* Though human life must be protected, and those who take it must die, God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. 2. *The delay would tend to exercise a salutary influence on the avenger.* Instead of slaying the murderer in the heat of passion, the *goel* would have time to think, and time to understand that God imposed upon him this dreadful task to teach a lesson, and not to license rage. The *goel* was to be "the redeemer of blood," rather than one revenging it in a fury almost as horrible as the murder itself. The redeemer of blood was to rescue it from contempt before men. His solemn act, based as it was upon justice, was to reinstate the blood and the life of man, as deservedly priceless, in the estimation of society. God did not teach the "avenger" to play echo to murder. 3. *The delay would thus be beneficial to all the nation.* Men would have time to read the true character of justice, discerning in it the firmness of a mercy which could not spare, rather than a hungry appetite which would not be satisfied without its meal. Justice is the awful side of Love, and not the best side of hatred; it is Love looking out upon the multitude, weeping while she rightfully destroys the one in order to keep the many from destroying each other and themselves.

IV. **The command given by the Lord, that the wilful murderer should be put to death.** There was to be no place of refuge for those found thus guilty. These cities of refuge supply an effective answer to the occasional demand made by some for the abolition of capital punishment. The passage in Genesis, though sufficiently plain to most people, has been thought by some open to argument. Thus Dr. Kalisch, after assuming that Gen. ix. 5, 6, is a prehistoric invention *of Moses* rather than a command of God, and after representing Moses as "unquestionably and strongly averse to the barbarous custom of revenge of blood" (an aversion of which he does not even attempt to supply any evidence), proceeds to question whether the Mosaic law is decisive for or against "capital punishment."

On philological grounds, though he leaves the translation substantially unaltered, he says of the fifth verse: "Therefore the words, 'I shall demand the soul of man from the brother of every one,' do not allude to the custom of revenge of blood, according to which the nearest relative was bound to pursue the murderer, but *to the legal punishment inflicted by the ordinary authorities.*" That is simply saying that this law, thus formally promulgated so soon after the deluge, alludes to the law, or, in other words, to itself; and as Dr. Kalisch does not tell us who "the ordinary authorities" for the execution of the murderer were, he at least leaves room for the conclusion that they may have been the avengers, or redeemers of blood, themselves. With one family alive on the earth when this "legal punishment" was commanded *to Noah*, who else could these "ordinary authorities" have been? But these laboured exegetical efforts in the discussion of two verses in Genesis leave the cities of refuge still untouched. In those six cities we see God commanding that shelter shall be deliberately prepared for the unintentional manslayer; we see also that the wilful murderer, after being pronounced to be such, was just as deliberately excluded from any shelter whatever. He was beyond the reach of ransom. No price was allowed to be taken for the blood of his victim. Thus, whatever discussion may be raised on the meaning of a few words in a verse, these six cities calmly and sadly deny that exegesis of the heart which is offered by an unthoughtful mercy. The wisdom of mercy has so much regard for the multitude, that, though it gladly gives in the delay required for judgment an opportunity for the repentance of the one, it cannot spare him. It is just that he should die; it would be an injustice to living men, and unmerciful to them, if he did not die. The Scripture answer and the moral answer made to the demand for the abolition of capital punishment is very like that of the modern Italian statesman, "Let the assassins begin."

**V. The instruction of the Lord that the refuge afforded to the manslayer should be a refuge in the name of the Lord.** The manslayer was undoubtedly held to have been guilty, though acquitted of murder. Even carelessness might be so culpable as to be judged worthy of punishment by death (Exod. xxi. 29). It is a mistake to suppose that "the stay in those cities was not deemed ignominious, but the effect of an inscrutable Divine decree." Even the man who had taken life unwittingly had sinned more or less grievously, as each case itself would determine. For that sin the manslayer was for a short time exposed to death. Rescuing him from such exposure, God Himself would be the sanctuary. The Israelites should find safety alone in Jehovah. It was religion that was seen stretching forth her hands to protect the endangered life. This was the case before these cities were appointed. The manslayer fled for refuge to the altar of God (Exod. xxi. 13, 14). So these cities of refuge are all Levitical cities. They were chosen without exception from the cities given as places of residence to the consecrated tribe. It was only in the mercy of Jehovah that there should be found a covert from human sin. Already the Lord was teaching His children the song: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." The name of the Lord was the strong tower into which the righteous and the sinner must alike run for safety.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verses 1—3.—God a Refuge for Man, and for all the Man.

**I. The cities of refuge as a manifestation of God's care for our physical life.**

**II. The cities of refuge as an expression of God's concern for the education of our moral feelings.**

**III. The cities of refuge as a symbol of God's provision for our spiritual salvation.**

Ver. 3.—"The Avenger of Blood."

"The blood of a human being cries for revenge to heaven (Gen. iv. 10; Heb. xii. 24).

"The soul of the slain raises its voice (Job xxiv. 12; Rev. vi. 9).

"The blood of the innocent victims hangs at the skirts of the murderer's garments (Jer. ii. 34).

"The blood is identical with the life of the individual (Ps. xciv. 21; Matt. xxiii. 35).

"This latter view was not unfamiliar to other ancient nations; for, in the Egyptian hieroglyphics, the hawk, which was believed to feed upon blood alone, represents the human soul (*Horapollo* i. 7); Aristotle considered the blood as the seat of the soul (*De Anim.* i. 2); whilst Empedocles limited it to the blood of the heart; Virgil speaks of an effusion of the 'purple soul' (*Æn.* ix. 349); it was the doctrine of Critias that blood is the soul; and of Pythagoras, that the soul is nourished by the blood. The vital principle, or the soul ('*nephesh*'), lies in an unsubstantial breath; it is invisible, and removes the organism after laws which will eternally remain a secret, known to the Creator alone: but as its visible representative the *blood* was considered, in which the physical power is concentrated; for a diminution of blood is attended with a decrease of the vital powers, and at last with dissolution and death. The breath is purely spiritual, and comes from God; the blood is a physical element, of earthly material; the former is indestructible, and escapes when the latter is shed; but as it has once been the medium through which the vigour of the soul manifested itself, it is an object of sacredness, and is, not inappropriately, itself called the soul (Lev. xvii. 11). But it is remarkable that the Bible never attributes to the blood a higher mental power, nor does it ever identify the blood with the spirit ('*ruach*'), but invariably represents it as the principle of physical life ('*nephesh*'). Blood would defile the earth, if it remained unpunished."—[*M. M. Kalisch.*]

Verses 2—4. Preparation for Mercy and Judgment.

I. The Lord contemplating His people's future. "Whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses." This provision of the cities of refuge had long been thought of and purposed by God. 1. *Divine outlook.* 2. *Divine preparation.* 3. *Divine patience.*

II. The Lord judging men, not by the deed of the hand, but by the thought of the heart. "Unawares and unwittingly." Men are too apt to look only on the acts which their fellows have done. God would have men ask how the acts were committed, and why.

III. The Lord committing His own judgment to the execution of men. "He shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city; and they shall take," *etc.* 1. *God could have avenged the slain Himself.* Had He been so minded, He could have carried out His own judgments. He would but have had to will, and the guilty would have suffered, or died, and the innocent would have been delivered. 2. *God preferred that His people should execute His judgments.* (*a*) Direct judgment would have made virtue mechanical. (*b*) If men executed the Lord's decisions, they would better learn to approve them and sympathise with them.

IV. The Lord saving men in connection with the urgent efforts of the men themselves. Those who would benefit by the gracious provision of God must "*flee* unto one of those cities." With the avenger of blood behind him, the pursued man might have to flee with all his powers. "Salvation is of the Lord," but the Lord does not save the man who does not concern himself to be saved.

Verse 6.—Liberty through the Death of the High Priest.

I. Condemnation coming through offence against God's law. The condemnation was (1) for an actual and great offence; (2) it was after deliberate investigation and judgment; (3) and it remained in force till release came after the manner of Divine appointment.

II. Pardon given through the death of God's anointed High Priest. 1. *Release came only through the death of the people's anointed mediator.* No other death would suffice. The death of the high priest was held to be efficacious,

because he had been "anointed with the holy oil" (Numb. xxxv. 25). 2. *The death of one might thus become the release of many.* Every refugee in each of the six cities would at once obtain his liberty.

**III. Liberty that follows God's pardon, and as such, liberty as full and complete as that enjoyed before the offence.** Each offender would be as free to return, and as free in his home and in the city where it was situated, as if he had never transgressed. Thus does God look forward and prepare a way by which He may pass over our offences. He never passes over our better deeds. The service rendered by Nebuchadrezzar was not forgotten (Ezek. xxix. 18—20). Even the cup of cold water is not to lose its reward. God concerns Himself to remember our services, but to blot out our sins. As in the ancient festival of the exodus, as in this liberation of these captives on the death of the high priest, and as in the glorious work of Calvary, the passovers of God never have to do with our services, often have to do with our sins, and always with our deliverance from suffering and danger.

THE CITIES OF REFUGE AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE WORK OF CHRIST.

"I. There were several cities of refuge, and they were so appointed in several parts of the country, that the manslayer, wherever he dwelt in the land of Israel, might, in half a day, reach one or other of them; so, though there is but one Christ appointed for our refuge, yet, wherever we are, He is a refuge at hand, a very present help; for the word is nigh us, and Christ in the word.

"II. The manslayer was safe in any of these cities; so in Christ, believers that flee to Him, and rest in Him, are protected from the wrath of God and the curse of the law. 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.'

"III. They were all Levites' cities. It was kindness to the poor prisoner, that, though he might not go up to the place where the ark was, yet he was in the midst of Levites who would teach him the good knowledge of the Lord. So it is the work of ministers of the gospel to bid sinners welcome to Christ, and to assist and counsel those who, through Christ, are in Him.

"IV. Even strangers and sojourners, though they were not native Israelites, might take the benefit of these cities of refuge. So in Christ Jesus no difference is made between Greek and Jew. Even the sons of the stranger that by faith flee to Christ shall be safe in Him.

"V. Even the suburbs or borders of the city were a sufficient security to the offender. So there is virtue even in the hem of Christ's garment for the healing and saving of poor sinners. If we cannot reach to a full assurance, we may comfort ourselves in a good hope through grace.

"VI. The protection which the manslayer found in the city of refuge was not owing to the strength of its walls, or gates, or bars, but purely to the Divine appointment. So it is the word of the gospel that gives souls safety in Christ; 'for Him hath God the Father sealed.'

"VII. If the offender were ever caught straggling without the borders of his city of refuge, or stealing home to his own house again, he lost the benefit of his protection, and lay exposed to the avenger of blood. So those that are in Christ must abide in Christ; for it is at their peril if they forsake Him and wander from Him. Drawing back is to perdition."—[*Matt. Henry.*]

THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF ACCEPTING PECUNIARY RANSOM FOR A MURDERER.

"The punishment of murder by a pecuniary fine, which is admitted by the Mohammedan law, would not only be revolting to all feelings of justice, but it would be extremely dangerous for the safety of society; it would destroy the equality of the rich and the poor before the law, and would necessarily lead to a fatal deterioration of public morality."—[*Kalisch.*]

THE LAW OF RETALIATION.

"It will be evident that what some have so highly extolled for its equity, the *lex talionis*, or law of retaliation, can never be, in all cases, an adequate or permanent rule of punishment. In some cases, indeed, it seems to be dictated by natural reason; as in the cases of conspiracies to do an injury, or false accusations of the innocent; to which we may add the law of the Jews and Egyptians mentioned by Josephus and Diodorus Siculus, that whoever, without sufficient cause, was found with any mortal poison in his possession, should himself be obliged to take it. But in general the difference of persons, place, time, provocation, or other circumstances, may enhance or mitigate the offence; and in such cases retaliation can never be a proper measure of justice. . . . There are very many crimes that will in no shape admit of these penalties, without manifest absurdity and wickedness. Theft cannot be punished by theft, defamation by defamation, forgery by forgery, and the like; and we may add that those instances wherein retaliation appears to be used, even by the Divine authority, do not really proceed upon the rule of exact retribution, by doing to the criminal the same hurt he has done to his neighbour, and no more; but this correspondence between the crime and punishment is a consequence from some other principle. Death is punished with death as the appro-

priate manner of visiting an offence of the highest enormity, but not as an equivalent, for that would be expiation, and not punishment. Nor is death always an equivalent for death; the execution of a needy, decrepit assassin is a poor satisfaction for the murder of a nobleman in the bloom of his youth, and full enjoyment of his friends, his honours, and his fortune. But the reason on which this sentence is grounded seems to be that this is the highest penalty that man can inflict, and tends most to the security of mankind, by removing one murderer from the earth, and setting a dreadful example to deter others: so that even this grand instance proceeds upon other principles than those of retaliation.

"We may remark that it was once attempted to introduce into England the law of retaliation as a punishment for such only as preferred malicious accusations against others; it being enacted by Stat. 37, Edw. III., c. 18, that such as preferred any suggestions to the king's great council should put in sureties of taliation; that is, to incur the same pain that the other should have had, in case the suggestions were found untrue. But, after one year's experience, this punishment of taliation was rejected, and imprisonment adopted in its stead."—[*Stephen's Commentaries on the Laws of England.*]

THE SUPPOSED PROMINENCE OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE.

"I somewhere read, when young, that these cities were situated on commanding heights, so as to be visible at a great distance; but this one (Kedesh-Naphtali), at least, is hid away under the mountain, and cannot be seen until one is close upon it. The idea, though common and even ancient, is certainly a mistake. Nablûs and Hebron, the other two cities west of the Jordan, lie in low valleys, and it is evident that the selection was made without reference to elevation."—[*The Land and the Book.*]

Was it not well that these cities should be placed upon the plain, or in the valley, rather than upon a hill? The roads to these cities were ordered to be kept with special care, and the direction in which they lay is said to have been indicated by guide-posts. Each Israelite would thus have no difficulty in finding his adjacent sanctuary. The breath and strength of the runner are to be considered, as well as his knowledge. Pursued by the impassioned avenger, and dispirited by fear, it might be all important to the manslayer that in the last mile of his flight, when exhausted and spent, he should not find the city set upon a hill, up which, even in that condition, he must still flee for safety.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *THE CITIES FOR THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. **The heads of the fathers**] On this phrase, cf. note on chap. xiv. 1. The fathers of the tribe of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari (Gen. xlvi. 11; Exod. vi. 16). From the Kohathites sprang the priestly family of Aaron. Hence the order of precedence was not the apparent order of birth. In the duties of the Levitical service the Kohathites stood first, the Gershonites next, and the Merarites last. This is also the order in which the lots were drawn for the three branches of the tribe. 4—8. **And the lot came out for the families**, *etc.*] These five verses give a short summary of the distribution, shewing the tribes among which each branch of the Levites settled, and the number of the cities apportioned to each. The Aaronites had thirteen cities, the rest of the Kohathites ten cities, the Gershonites thirteen cities, and the Merarites twelve cities. The remainder of the chapter records the details of the distribution. Most of the cities given to the Levites have already been noticed in the distribution made of them to the tribes. 5. **The rest of the children of Kohath**] These were the descendants of Amram through Moses, and the entire posterity of Izehar. Hebron, and Uzziel (Exod. vi. 18; Numb. iii. 19). 12. **Gave they to Caleb**] "If the fields, belonging to the Levites, were thus left in the hands of the tribe, by whom the city had been given up, the Levites cannot have been the sole inhabitants of these cities. For, if they were, where can the Israelites have lived, by whom the land was cultivated? We must certainly assume that the Levites only received as many houses in the cities assigned them, as their numerical strength required, and that it was these which remained in their hands as an inalienable possession. At least, there were in the cities as many other inhabitants as were necessary to cultivate the soil. Moreover, the law (Lev. xxv. 32—34) which prohibited the perpetual alienation of the houses of the Levites, and the sale of the pasture land belonging to their cities, in addition to its provision that, if sold, the houses should revert to the Levites in the year of Jubilee, presupposed that there would be other Israelites besides the Levites living in the Levitical cities. At the same time it proves that the Levites held the houses allotted to them, not merely as usufructuarii, but as owners and landlords in full possession." [*Keil.*] 15. **Holon**] In 1 Chron. vi. 58, called Hilen. It has not been identified. 16. **Ain**] Given as "Ashan" in the list of priests' cities in 1 Chron. vi. 59. Keil thinks that the latter passage probably contains the correct reading. This seems very doubtful. Just as the Holon of Josh. xv. 51, xxi. 15, is in the text in Chronicles altered to Hilen, so Ain appears to have been changed to Ashan. Ain and Ashan are more than once mentioned *in the same verse* as distinct and separate cities (chap. xix. 7; 1 Chron. iv. 32)

situated near to each other, and belonging to Simeon. 18. **Anathoth**] Conspicuous in later history as the birthplace of Jeremiah (Jer. i. 1, *etc.*). It was also the native town of Abiezer, one of David's captains (2 Sam. xxiii. 27). It was to Anathoth that Solomon banished Abiathar the priest, after the death of David (1 Kings ii. 26). Robinson identified it with *Anâta*, a small village about four miles N.N.E. of Jerusalem. **Almon**] In 1 Chron. vi. 60, called Alemeth. Thought by Robinson to be *Almit*, near Anathoth, on the north-east. 22. **Kibzaim**] Called also Jokmeam in 1 Chron. vi. 68. The very similar meaning of the words Kibzaim and Jokmeam favours the idea that they were two names for the same place. 24. **Aijalon**] The Ajalon of chap. x. 12; xix. 42. 25. **Tanach**] Called Taanach in chap. xii. 21, xvii. 11. **Gath-Rimmon**] "Instead of Gath-Rimmon, we find, in 1 Chron. vi. 70, Bileam, another form of Jibleam (chap. xvii. 11). This reading in the Chronicles is evidently the correct one, and Gath-Rimmon has most probably crept into the text here, through an oversight, out of the preceding verse, although, from the frequent occurrence of this name in connection with different places, it is certainly possible that Gath-Rimmon in the half-tribe of Manasseh may have been another name for the city of Jibleam." [*Keil.*] 27. **Beesh-terah**] Meaning, "the house" or "temple of Astarte," and hence, in 1 Chron. vi. 70, called by the name of Ashtaroth. The name Ashtaroth is also given in chap. xii. 4, where the city is spoken of as containing a residence of Og, King of Bashan. Cf. also chap. xiii. 12, Gen. xiv. 5. 28. **Dabareh**] In chap. xix. 12, Daberath. 29. **Jarmuth**] In chap. xix. 21, Remeth. 30. **Abdon**] Probably the place called Hebron in chap. xix. 28. "The name Abdon is found in twenty MSS., Josh. xix. 28, instead of the common reading Hebron." [*Gesen.*] 32. **Kartan**] According to Keil, the word is a contraction of Kirjathaim, named in 1 Chron. vi. 76. Kartan is not mentioned among the cities of Naphtali, chap. xix. 35—38. 34, 35. **Kartah . . . Dimnah**] Neither is known, and the names do not occur elsewhere, unless the former be the Kattath of chap. xix. 15. 36, 37. **And out of the tribe of Reuben, *etc.***] These two verses, at one time omitted on the authority of the Masora, are now almost universally received as genuine, and as necessary to the harmony of the text with itself. 42. **With their suburbs round about them**] An allusion to the pasture land set apart for the maintenance of the cattle of the Levites (Numb. xxxv. 2—5). At the close of this verse, a clause of fourteen lines is added by the LXX., taken partly from chap. xix. 49, 50, and partly, says Keil, from a Jewish legend.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE PARAGRAPHS.*

**Verses 1—8.—The Inheritance of the Priests and Levites.**

This plea of the Levitical families was necessarily deferred till the tribes had received their respective lots. The estate of each tribe had to be determined before these assignments from each estate could be made. No tribe could give cities to the Levites till they knew what cities they had to give. The plea of the Levites was founded on the command of the Lord. There are no people in the whole community who may not find some good words of God to turn into prayer. God has words for all people. He overlooks none. None is so poor that he may not find some promise to render into a petition.

I. **The Lord's confirmation of words that were past.** Nearly two centuries and a half before this, a dying patriarch had prophesied of Simeon and Levi: "I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel" (Gen. xlix. 7). To some extent this prediction had already been fulfilled in respect to Simeon; they were divided in the territory of Judah. Here, Levi is scattered throughout the entire land. God fulfils His words (1) imperceptibly, (2) patiently, (3) surely. Possibly ere ever the people had thought on what was being done, the ancient utterance of Jacob had become an accomplished fact.

II. **The Lord's anticipation of wants that were to come.** "The children of Aaron the priest had by lot out of the tribe of Judah, and out of the tribe of Simeon, and out of the tribe of Benjamin, thirteen cities." Jerusalem, or Jebus, was at this time in the hands of the Canaanites. The ark was at Shiloh. But Jerusalem was to be the place of the future temple. It was at Jerusalem that the great religious centre of the land was presently to be founded, though as yet no sign of this had been given. How important that the priests should be near Jerusalem! God anticipates this, and so orders the lots that the priests' cities are immediately around the future city of the Lord; while the Kohathites, whose duties were next in importance to those of the priests, are placed next to the

priests geographically. Who can refuse to see the discerning eye and provident hand of Jehovah in this significant arrangement?

**III. The Lord's cultivation of the spiritual through the secular.** Here are geography and religion hand in hand. The spiritual teachers of the people are scattered among the people. The chief religious authorities are grouped around the future centre of religion. Nothing is too lowly for the care of God. Everything that tends to the welfare of a human soul takes on in that measure so much of the soul's own importance. Men label things secular, and then treat them as spiritually insignificant; God looks at the very placing of a man's dwelling in the light of so much help or hindrance to the finding of his eternal home.

Verses 13—19.—THE NUMBER OF CITIES ASSIGNED TO THE PRIESTS.

"Bertholdt and Maurer suppose this chapter to be a distinct document, drawn up at a later period. Their arguments are founded partly upon a fancied, but not actual, discrepancy between ver. 11 *seq.* and chap. xiv. 13 *seq.* (compared with chap. xv. 13), partly upon the assumption that Caleb did not receive his inheritance till after the death of Joshua, and in part on the impossibility of the increase in the posterity of Aaron's two sons having been sufficiently large for them to fill *two* cities during the lifetime of Joshua, to say nothing of thirteen (1 Chron. xxiv. 2). But this supposes the distributors to have been so shortsighted, that they only selected dwelling-places to meet the wants of the priestly families at that time, and made no allowance for subsequent increase. Moreover, the size of the cities is exaggerated, and the estimate of the number of the priests much too low. It is true that the number is not stated anywhere; but if we take into account that, on the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, Aaron was eighty-three years old, for he died in the fortieth year of the journey, and his age was then 123 (Numb. xxxiii. 38), we shall see that the fifth generation of his descendants might have been living at the time when the land was distributed, which was seven years after his death. Moreover, his two sons had together twenty-four male children, who were the ancestors of the twenty-four priestly ranks organised by David (1 Chron. xxiv.), and if we suppose each of these to have been the father of only six sons, in the third generation the sons of Aaron would have amounted to 144. On the same scale there would be 864 male descendants in the fourth generation, and in the fifth 5184. And even if the fifth generation still consisted of infants, there might easily be 975 families in existence, and thus in every city there could well be seventy-five families of priestly rank, or about 750 inhabitants, since the majority of the third, and even a small portion of the second, generation would be still alive, as well as the fourth and their children; for Eleazar, the head of the first, was not yet dead. And besides this, very few of the cities of Canaan can have been at that time of any magnitude, as we may infer from the fact that there were so many of them; and therefore, as the Levites were not the only inhabitants of their cities, but were associated with such of the other tribes as owned the land in the neighbourhood (cf. ver. 12), the number of cities assigned to the priests does not appear too great; much less will it appear so, when we remember that from the very first, several of these cities remained in the possession of the Canaanites, and were only wrested from them after a severe struggle, at a subsequent period. From all this, then, it is evident that there is no ground for disputing the antiquity of this account; which, in fact, cannot belong to a later period; for if it did, *Nob* would not be omitted, as that was a Levitical city in the reign of Saul (1 Sam. xxii. 19)."—[*Keil.*]

Verses 43—45.—THE GOOD THINGS WHICH THE LORD HATH SPOKEN.

**I. The good things of the Lord spoken unto the fathers.** The completed works of God are not aimless works, finished as best they can be. Every body that the Lord makes is a clothed skeleton. The features are wonderful, and the visible form beautiful; but the hidden plan and structure of the body, with all its

tendons and muscles, and nerves and arteries, is more wonderful and beautiful still. The words which had been spoken to the fathers were God's outlined plan of the body which He intended to create. 1. *The words of the Lord were words of long standing.* They had been spoken long before (Gen. xii. 7). God's way is one of patience. God's words to men, He works out through men. God works out His words by natural processes. Such processes are much slower than many would fain believe. It is only children who would look for seed-time and harvest in the same week, and Jehovah would train, not children, but men. 2. *The words of the Lord were never forgotten.* The years were very many, but Divine regard to the things which had been said was very constant (cf Gen. xv. 18; xxvi. 4; Exod. xxiii. 31, *etc.*). Either by direct or indirect words, God was continually reminding His people throughout these intervening centuries that His good words were ever in His remembrance. Divine patience has nothing of heedlessness. 3. *The words of the Lord were very comprehensive, and yet full of detail.* There were absolute words, promising the land, as a whole, in strong and unhesitating terms. There were also words which indicated the very position that the tribes were to occupy, and which described the character of their inheritance. The word of the Lord is very bold. God shews men things to come with as much exactness as men can shew things that have been. God's prophecies are among the world's most truthful histories.

**II. The good things of the Lord fulfilled unto the children.** 1. *The fulfilment was delayed through sin.* The forty years in the wilderness. Even these may be only a part of the delay which God saw to be necessary on account of human weakness and wickedness. 2. *The fulfilment was accomplished notwithstanding sin.* God absolutely performed His good words. "There stood not a man of all their enemies before them." None of the Canaanites dared to meet the Israelites in arms. God overcomes even our iniquities. 3. *Sin made the fulfilment less perfect than it might have been.* Many of the cities were still held by the Canaanites. This was because of the fear and unbelief and slothfulness of the Israelites (cf. on chap. xvi. 10; xvii. 12, 13; xviii. 3). For all this, no good word of God had failed. The promise was that the Canaanites should be driven out gradually (Exod. xxiii. 30), and that if the Israelites did not persist in driving them out, till all were gone, those that remained should be as "pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides" (Numb. xxxiii. 55). These conditions had not been forgotten (chap. xxiii. 11—14). Thus, this is no heedless exaggeration, as Maurer recklessly asserted. On God's part, every good thing had been made to come to pass.

**III. The good things of the Lord fulfilled to some men, and thus becoming the heritage of all men.** The moral effect of these predictions, and their scrupulous fulfilment, no one can calculate. Sceptical critics have spent their small animosities on the records in vain. The influence on contemporary nations must have been great. The influence on the generations of men who followed is past finding out. It is to-day as marvellous as ever. An old couplet ascribed to James I. tells us—

> "Crowns have their compass, length of days their date,
> Triumphs their tomb, felicities their fate."

So all the outward circumstances of this ancient heritage have changed. The pageantry of the old Judæan royalty was limited; the days of the national glory have spent themselves, long since; every victory won on these ancient battle-fields has found its grave; and the joy and glory of this ancient people have alike passed away. On all that is outward, the "Ichabod," expressive of the national decadence, has long been written. But the good things of the Lord, thus fulfilled to this departed people, are as good as ever. The real inheritance of God's fulfilled word came not so much to a few Israelites as to men; it was not nearly so much a thing of acres and cities and houses, as of reverence and

faith and prayer and love, through many generations. This part of the inheritance, also, was one of the good things of which the Lord had spoken when He said repeatedly, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Verse 44.—God's Great Gift of Rest.

I. Rest as the necessity of men.

II. Rest as the gift of the Lord.

III. Rest as becoming complete only through faith and labour.

Verse 45.—The Unfailing Words of the Lord.

I. The unfailing words of the Lord in contrast with the failing words of men. Man's words fail (1) because of thoughtlessness in utterance, (2) by reason of fickleness of regard, (3) and through feebleness in execution. The Lord's words are ever glorious, like the unfading stars of the firmament: "For that He is strong in power, not one faileth." Man's words are in many ways, and for various reasons, a fruitful source of shame.

II. The words of the Lord on "good things" in contrast with the Lord's words on "evil things." Divine words not only stand in contrast with words that are human, but with themselves. God never allows words to fail which tell of blessing and prosperity; it is only of things which bring to men suffering and loss that we ever find it written, "God repented of the evil that He said He would do unto them, and He did it not" (Jonah iii. 10; cf. also Deut. xxxii. 36; Jer. xviii. 10; Amos vii. 3, 6). Words like these are never written of God's "good things." He who speaks to men from above is slow to anger and swift to bless.

Verse 45.—Retrospect.

I. The retrospect of the godly. 1. *Provoking admiration of God.* (*a*) Great purposes. (*b*) Glorious promises. (*c*) Patient working. 2. *Awakening praise to God.* Admiration should not be silent. It should resolve itself into speech. The rapt admiration of the silent beholder is good for the individual; the praise when spoken, or written, helps men.

II. The retrospect of the ungodly. While the Israelites were looking back on the way in which Jehovah had led them, the Canaanites must have been very similarly engaged. The God of the Israelites, who had warned them through Ham and Canaan, their fathers, who had punished them at Sodom, and given them occasion for repentance in many solemn rumours of their coming overthrow, had spoken to these idolaters also. And here, too, not one thing had failed. A few short years before, and the Canaanites were in untroubled possession of the land. Now a few survivors looked out with awe from some of the fortified cities upon the graves of their comrades and the ruins of their nation. How did the retrospect affect these? It seems to have brought no penitence, and thus could work no praise. The surviving idolaters presently tempted the Israelites to idolatry. The retrospect of the godless man can only lead to true happiness and praise as it begins in sincere repentance.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### *THE GOING HOME OF THE EASTERN TRIBES.*

Critical Notes.—1. Then Joshua called] "As the return of the armed men belonging to the two tribes and a half is only described in general terms, by '*āz*,' as occurring somewhere about the same time as the events related before, it would not be at all at variance with the text to suppose that they were dismissed immediately after the conclusion of the wars.

**But such an assumption is disproved by ver. 9**, where they are said to have been dismissed from Shiloh, to which the Israelites only proceeded during the distribution of the land (chap. xviii. 1), by ver. 12, and also by the fact that their presence was necessary when the Levitical cities were selected, for this concerned them as much as the other tribes." [*Keil.*] **4. Get you unto your tents**] It is not necessary to suppose that the cities of Eastern Palestine needed rebuilding before the two and a half tribes could exchange their tents for houses. The people had been so long used to dwelling in tents, that very many years elapsed before this phrase was entirely discarded (1 Kings viii. 66, xii. 16, *etc.*). The families of these 40,000 men, we are specially told in Numb. xxxii. 10, were to retire to the fenced cities. **5. The commandment and the law**]="The *mitsvah* and the *torah*." Probably the former referred to special commandments given through Moses, Joshua, and other individual teachers; the latter, to the written law, given for their ordinary religious guidance. **8. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren**] Those who had remained in Eastern Palestine were to share in these riches. This was as God had already ordained (Numb. xxxi. 27), and as David again instructed the people in after years (1 Sam. xxx. 24). **9. The land of Canaan . . . the country of Gilead**] Canaan is here put for Canaan proper, in opposition to Gilead, which stands for Gilead and Bashan, inclusively. **10. The borders of Jordan**] *Lit.*="the circles of the Jordan." So, in chap. xiii. 2, we have "the circles of the Philistines." The immediate neighbourhood of the Jordan, the Ghor, is meant, possibly with some reference to the windings of the river. **That are in the land of Canaan**] After the immediately preceding definition of Canaan as being limited to the land on the western side of the river (ver. 9), it does not seem likely that in this verse "Canaan" can be meant to include any part of the land on the eastern side. The phrase "over against," in verse 11, must not be pressed too severely. Gesenius renders *'el-mūl* by "*in the face* or *front of*." Even if the words "*over against* the land of Canaan" be allowed to stand, the speakers on the western side of the river, mentally putting themselves in the position of the eastern tribes, of whom they were complaining, might naturally say of an altar built on the western bank, "They have built an altar *over against* the land of Canaan." Dr. Clarke says: "It could not be a place for the purpose of public worship to their own people, if built on the opposite side of Jordan." To this it is enough to reply that the eastern tribes did not build it for public worship. It was exactly that which they utterly disclaimed. As to the contention of Dr. Bliss, that "the altar could not bear witness for *them*," if built on the western side of the river, that was the very side on which they wished it to bear witness. The fact that the elders of the tribes took this erection to be an altar for sacrifice, seems to indicate that the deputation, in their indignation, did not stay to visit the altar, but, acting on the report which had reached them, crossed the Jordan at some point more to the north than "at the passage of the children of Israel." The phrase, "in the land of Canaan," when compared with the very same words as they occur in verse 9, must be held to contain the absolute statement that the altar was built on the western side of the river. Since writing this note, the following remarks have been met with in Mr. Groser's excellent work on this book: "The site of this most interesting memorial has been recently discovered by the officers of the survey of Palestine. It is an almost inaccessible mountain, except from the north, where the ascent is called *Tal'at abu 'Ayd*, 'the going up to Ed.' It projects like a white bastion towards the river, and on its summit are the remains of a huge monument of masonry, bearing traces of fire on its upper surface. It is mentioned in the Jewish Talmud under the name of *Surtabeh*, and is said to have been a beacon station. The view from the height is magnificent." To this, in answer to a private inquiry, Mr. Groser adds: "The site is certainly on the western side of the Jordan, as you conclude." **12. The whole congregation**] The excitement and indignation against an act which seemed in direct opposition to the law were general. Moses had strictly forbidden sacrifice, under pain of death, saving at the door of the tabernacle (Lev. xvii. 3—9; Deut. xii. 2—14). Yet, while the eastern tribes were wrong not to have communicated with Joshua and the high priest about an act so liable to be misunderstood, the western tribes also erred through hastiness. Had their hasty assumption been right, the contemplated war would have been not only just, but necessary (cf. Deut. xiii.). **16. What trespass is this that ye have committed?**] The deep nature of the indignation is seen in these grave charges, continued through five verses. Not even the journey had sufficed to give place to calm thought. Let the eastern tribes have been ever so wrong, justice required that they should be examined before being condemned. Instead of examination, here are direct assertions of guilt, which are presently changed into pleasure at the thing which had been done (ver. 30, 33). **17. From which we are not cleansed until this day**] Perhaps Phinehas and the elders concluded that this very act gave witness to the spirit of disobedience not yet put away, or it may be that the thought of the lingering taint had reference to the former impurity itself, which some still secretly cherished (chap. xxiv. 20—23). **19. Pass ye over**, *etc.*] A noble generosity and a sincere love are seen mingling throughout with this hasty indignation. **22. The Lord God of gods**, *etc.*] The terrible accusation naturally awakens a similar earnestness in denial, shewing itself in "the broken speech of suddenly accused innocence." The abrupt energy of wounded love is seen throughout the entire defence. **Save us not this day**] A parenthetical adjuration addressed to Jehovah. In the strong consciousness of innocence, the speaker suddenly breaks away from the explanation just commenced, and appeals to God Himself. **24. And if we have not rather done it for fear, *etc.*]** "***And if we have not done it rather from anxiety, for a reason**, for we said,*

*To-morrow*," etc. [*Keil.*] What is meant is, that they had acted from a laudable anxiety, and for a good purpose. In spirit, it is like the appeal of David, who, also, when suffering from an unjust reproach, said, "Is there not a cause?" Cf. 1 Sam. xvii. 29, where the same word, *dāv'ar*—"*a thing*," "*a cause*," is also used. 25. **For the Lord hath made Jordan a border, etc.**] "The anxiety was not unfounded, in so far as in the promises only Canaan was spoken of, therefore only the land west of the Jordan, according to the clear signification of ver. 10. Comp. Gen. xii. 7, xiii. 15, xv. 18, xvii. 8, and in particular, Numb. xxxiv. 1—12." [*Fay.*] 27. **That we might do the service of the Lord before Him**] "*Before His face*." [*Keil.*] The reference is, of course, to the Lord's presence at Shiloh. 28. **Behold the pattern of the altar of the Lord**] They had built their altar in the likeness of the altar at the tabernacle, in order that the significance of their memorial might be well understood. At the place of "the passage of the children of Israel" (ver. 11), where all the people had passed over, they erected, *on the west side of the river*, a copy of the altar of the Lord. Its likeness to the altar, and its position *in Canaan*, and by the ancient ford, would seem to say, "All Israelites not in Canaan must cross into Canaan to offer any sacrifice to Jehovah." It was a significant finger-post, eloquent in its very dumbness, declaring the one way of acceptable worship. 30. **It pleased them**] *Marg.* = "*it was good in their eyes*." The thing about which they had been so prematurely violent only needed explanation. The two and a half tribes certainly ought to have given the explanation before they began to build; the remaining tribes as certainly ought to have asked it before mustering the army for war. However, the wrath of man was full of praise to God. Most noble traits are manifested, both by the hasty accusers and by the too thoughtless offenders. 34. **Called the altar Ed**] "Luther gave the sense correctly: 'And the children of Reuben and Gad named the altar, that it may be a witness between us,' *etc.* Hence the words *Kî 'ēd hū bēnōthēnu* contain both the name and the explanation." [*Keil.*] It is not said whether or not this name was given to the altar *before* the deputation of princes made their remonstrance.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1—9.

### The Faithful Past and the Importunate Future.

The war being substantially over, Joshua proceeded to dismiss the two and a half tribes to their homes. The exact time of this dismissal is not recorded, but it was evidently after the setting up of the tabernacle at Shiloh (cf. ver. 9, chap. xviii. 1). Although the Canaanites were subdued, so that they could not stand before the children of Israel, yet they were not conquered entirely. The two and a half tribes had promised Moses that they would not return to their homes on the east of Jordan until their brethren had received "every man his inheritance." If this promise had not been completely fulfilled, that was not the fault of the eastern tribes, but of their brethren, who were "slack to go to possess the land." Thus, considering that they had honourably discharged their engagement through Moses, Joshua freely dismissed these forty thousand men to their own inheritance.

This passage brings under our notice the following points of interest:—

I. **Arduous service faithfully rendered.** These men had striven year after year, keeping "all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded them." 1. *Faithful service given, irrespective of either sphere or time.* The sphere was the field of battle. The labour was the toil of war. It was amid perils and carnage and blood that these men continued true. They knew not when they might be free to meet again their fathers and mothers, their wives and children. Campaign followed campaign, and still the grim strife went on. None knew when it would be finished. All of them must often have been weary. Notwithstanding things like these, no one is said to have deserted. Each waited till he was discharged. Men often excuse themselves from the service of the Lord, who might find a rebuke in the conduct of these faithful soldiers. "There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his Master." The taunt of Nabal, undeserved by David, is often merited by others. Men get disappointed with their sphere. It is not what they expected. They forget that they too stand pledged to a battle-field. Men get wearied with the long term of their service. They think it is high time that their place in the ranks should be filled by others. For

such it is written, "Be thou faithful unto death." 2. *Faithful service maintained in view of that which was fair and right.* The western tribes had helped to win the inheritance of the eastern tribes (cf. Numb. xxi. 21—35). Thus this service which the eastern tribes had been rendering to their brethren of the west was the discharge of a debt. The debt was fairly due; it was just and right that it should be paid. How much do we owe to others? How much of the estate which we enjoy to-day has been won for us by men who have gone before us, and by men who are about us now? (*a*) *Think of our inheritance of property and position.* Much of that which most men possess has come from others. The position in which men are able to earn their livelihood is generally owing very much to the labour and endurance of predecessors. No man has any right to spend all his money on himself. Much is owing to men. (*b*) *Think of our inheritance as citizens.* Our liberties are born of the labours, and imprisonments, and bereavements, and death of many who have gone before. Others are toiling now, that we may inherit and enjoy our privileges as citizens. Some Christian people look on political activity as almost sinful. The true state of the case is exactly the opposite; it is sinful not to render such political service as we can. It is a debt we owe. God has given us no more right to be selfish and idle here than elsewhere. (*c*) *Think of our inheritance in social life.* Our family mercies, and our privileges in our own circle of friends are, in many instances, so much that has been won for us and preserved to us by our fellows. Something is owing to men here. (*d*) *Think of our inheritance in the world of literature and science and art.* "Other men have laboured," etc. Our joy in this great realm represents so much toil and brain, so much weariness and pain and disease in the lives of our brethren. Something is owing from us to those who are ignorant. Where we can pay a little of this great debt back, there our service is due. (*e*) *Think, above all, of our inheritance in the realm of religion.* Every conscientious man should sometimes have visions of the suffering servants of Christ who have preceded him in the conflicts of this glorious kingdom. What a panorama of smitten and wounded men might well pass before us all! Bunyan in his prison; Milton deprived of office and comforts; Knox confronting his sovereign; Luther journeying wearily, but with tremendous energy, to Worms; the generations of ardent workers and patient sufferers; the imprisoned fugitives of the catacombs; the gory forms, torn of beasts, or smitten with swords, bleeding for us in the amphitheatre; the noble army of martyrs, fighting for our inheritance; and then, back of all this, the cross of Jesus. "O Lord God, truly I am Thy servant!" "We are not our own; we are bought with a price." The two and a half tribes fought to pay a debt; our debt is far greater than theirs. 3. *Faithful service continued in view of a promise which had been given.* These men had pledged themselves to this conflict (Numb. xxxii. 16—19, 25—27). That pledge they had faithfully kept. "Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day." Time should make no difference to promises. Unexpected toil should make no difference. Neither many years nor sore conflicts should ever wear our promises threadbare. 4. *Faithful service rendered not for personal gain, but for the welfare of brethren.* The inheritance of the two and a half tribes was won already, at the time of crossing the Jordan. Every march they made was for the inheritance of others. Every blow they struck was for a brother. Every victory they helped to win was a victory to add to the possessions of some one else. There is no more honourable service in the whole record of the seven years' war in Canaan, than this which speaks of the steady faithfulness of these eastern tribes. Our conflicts for our own inheritance are necessary; it is our strife for the inheritance of our brethren which is noble. 5. *Faithful service given in view of what was expected by God.* It was not simply that they had promised Moses, or that duty to their brethren imposed upon them this arduous task. God also required of these men that they should be found faithful. Not to help their brethren would be sinful. "If ye will not do so, behold ye have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin

will find you out" (Numb. xxxii. 23). Thus did these forty thousand helpers of the brethren go on with their patient task. Not only did men deserve this service; God expected it. Gratitude to Him would allow of nothing less. How much do we owe to God? What is God expecting from us? How far, in the past, have we fallen short of that which God required at our hands? **II. Faithful service gratefully acknowledged.** When men serve their fellows, they not seldom are left to reflect on the unthankfulness of their fellows; when men serve God, they are never left to feel that they have served in vain. The true servant of God manifests the spirit of God. 1. *Joshua acknowledges the services of these men in words of sincere commendation.* He praised them for having obeyed Moses, obeyed himself, for having been steadfast to their brethren, and for having kept faithfully the commandments of the Lord (ver. 2, 3). 2. *Joshua acknowledges their services by generous gifts* (ver. 8). The two and a half tribes seem to have had allotted to them a fair share of the spoil. It was so abundant that even these forty thousand warriors might share it with their brethren. They who serve the Lord's true servants will not be suffered to serve in vain; much more will they who serve the Lord Himself be abundantly repaid. Even the cup of cold water, given in the name of Christ, shall "in no wise lose its reward." "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." **III. Indebtedness to the future arising out of the faithful past.** 1. *The past gave new obligations to watchfulness.* "Take diligent heed" (ver. 5). They who had been so careful not to fail were to feel more constrained to watchfulness than ever. 2. *The past gave new obligations to obedience.* "Take heed to do the commandment," etc. No child of God is allowed to take relaxation in sin. He who has been faithful for long must never say, "I will now rest awhile." A good past must never be a motive to an indifferent present. Instead of this, it is ever written, in some way or other, "Hold fast that which thou hast." 3. *The past gave new obligations to love God.* "Love the Lord your God." Love never remits any of her claims. If we have loved God, His love can suffer no diminution in ours. True love has an infinity of room for increase, but no mind for decrease. God desires that we love Him more; He is never willing that we should love Him to-day any less than we loved Him yesterday. 4. *The past gave new obligations to be generous to men* (ver. 9). "Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren." The men who had given generous service were to go on and crown the edifice of an exalted character by bestowing generous gifts.

The man who has a good past stands committed to goodness through all eternity. Every good day of life makes the obligations of to-morrow so much more onerous. Character is so much moral stock, and he who recklessly throws away a fortune is poor indeed. Spiritual life is so much spiritual property, and he who rushes from such riches to bankruptcy must know an agony of loss, of which a poorer man could have no conception. The gipsy might burn his ragged tent, and walk on, thinking himself not much the poorer; the owner of a mansion, with many perishable treasures within, could not leave the ruins of his similarly destroyed abode saving with a heavy heart. The thief of many years commits one more theft, and seems to add but little to his pain; but woe to the man convicted of stealing, who has behind him a long and honest life. It goes hard with obedient Moses when he once turns rebel, and the ardent and loving Peter cannot deny Christ with as little cost in tears and anguish as can Caiaphas or Herod. God proposes to forget our sins. He never proposes to forget our faithfulness and love, and we never can forget them either. We may get cold for a season, forgetting the claims of bygone prayers and ardent worship, of former earnest service and fervent love. No man can do that with impunity. He who has been true will presently discover that his falseness is so much terrible sorrow. He too will find himself saying:

> "Where is the blessedness I knew
> When first I saw the Lord?"

He who begins to serve his brethren is beginning that which, while strength and opportunities continue, he can never leave off. The man who begins to serve God is beginning that which in eternity itself he can never lay aside. This is no bondage, saving the bondage of love. The path of the just "shineth more and more unto the perfect day." He who fights the battles of the Lord can know nothing of retreats. He may change the field; he must go on with the conflict. Canaan or Gilead, it matters not which; the very faithfulness that has been calls urgently, "Be diligent." The noble past ever cries importunately for a still nobler future.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 2.—Obedience an Opportunity for Triumph. Our conflicts with the enemies of our life are God's opportunities, in which He would see us triumph over ourselves.

God's Liberal Construction of our Obedience. He who says of our sin, "He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all," says no less of even our feeble and broken services, when they are rendered from loving and true hearts, "Ye have kept *all* that was commanded you."

Obedience as a Duty.—"Brethren, what eber de good God tell me in dis blessed book to do, dat I'm gwine to do. If I see in it dat I must jump troo a stone wall, I'm gwine to jump at it. Goin' troo it belongs to God, jumpin' at it belongs to me."—[*Negro Preacher.*]

Obedience in All Things.—"To obey God in some things of religion, and not in others, shews an unsound heart. Childlike obedience moves towards every command of God, as the needle points in that direction from which the loadstone draws."—[*Watson.*]

"A soul sincerely obedient will not pick and choose what commands to obey, and what to reject, as hypocrites do. An obedient soul is like a crystal glass with a light in the midst, which shines forth through every part thereof. A man sincerely obedient lays such a charge upon his whole man as Mary the mother of Christ did upon all the servants at the feast in Cana: 'Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.'"—[*Brooks.*]

The Benefits of Obedience.—"In evil times it fares best with them who are most careful about duty, and least about safety.—[*Hammond.*]

Verse 3.—Fidelity and its Results.

**I. Fidelity to brethren provoking the gratitude of brethren.**

**II. Fidelity to God eliciting the commendation of God's servant.**

**III. Fidelity to men and God the only true fidelity to self.**

Verse 4.—Entering into Rest.

**I. Rest according to the purpose and promise of God.** "The Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as He promised them." This is ever the secret of all true rest. Rest begins in God. Rest is wrought out by God. Rest is completed and given by God. Our efforts are but the channels through which His purposes and promises run into the ocean of accomplishment. The fighting of all the thousands of Israel had still left the land to be obviously and most manifestly a Divine gift. The seven years' toil of men could hardly so much as begin to obscure the centuries of the mercy of Jehovah. Many promises, steady persistence, and mighty miracles on the part of God, had left no room for a single Israelite to be tempted to say, "We won the land by our gigantic efforts and brilliant strategy and persevering toil." Probably there was not an Israelite who did not see that this "rest" had in it far more of God's giving than of man's getting. It is not less so in that higher rest towards which God's children are pressing now. The Lord may do His part of the work more hiddenly than of old; His working is none the less actual. The centuries of His preparing mercy can never be shorn of their glory by the few years of our feeble and broken struggles. The secret of true rest is ever in God's gift.

**II. Rest through the service of our fellow-men.** "Now therefore return ye." That is to say, though the rest was God's gift, He had bestowed it through men. 1. *The gift of God comes through human efforts.* These forty thousand men had been some of His instruments. Now that the rest was won, they might go home. God left room for these eastern tribes to feel that they had helped to bring about this good issue. God gave occasion for the western tribes to feel that, in part, they were indebted for rest to their brethren. As a father, leaning over the shoulder of his little child, leaves the child some ground to suppose that it is carrying the heavy burden, which is really borne by the strength of the parent; so, in bearing the burdens of life, God leaves us room to suppose that we are doing much ourselves, and that we can do much to help each other. However much we may seem to be lifting, and however many of our fellows may grasp the burden to help us, God's hand ever reaches over from behind us, and bears the bulk of the load. The child of God who is spiritually sagacious, will sometimes, at least, glance upward, and detecting the heavenly Father's hand, feel glad to sing, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee." 2. *The efforts of others are made a necessary help to our own.* Who can look on the dividing of the Jordan, the overthrow of Jericho, or the miracle at Beth-horon, and not feel how readily God could have dispensed with any services which could be rendered by these eastern soldiers? Yet God would have them to help also. It is God's way: He loves to make us feel that we can aid our brother: He loves to make our brethren feel that they cannot do without our assistance.

> "Needful auxiliars are our friends, to give
> To social man true knowledge of himself.
> Full on ourselves, descending in a line,
> Pleasure's bright beam is *feeble* in delight:
> Delight *intense* is taken by rebound;
> Reverberated pleasures fire the breast."
>
> *Young.*

Thus does God work out our rest by His personal love and might, command our own patient and energetic efforts ere we can enter in, and make us no less dependent on the service of our brethren for a really glad inheritance.

**III. Rest won for others, and thereby obtained and established for ourselves.** "Therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession." And these men of the eastern tribes would go home all the more gladly because of the help which they had been able to give to their brethren. 1. *Their inheritance would be richer.* They would have the joy of a good conscience superadded to the possession of a rich estate. 2. *Their inheritance would be more secure.* If the western land had not been as fully conquered as it was, the eastern possessions could not have been so safe. In helping to drive out Canaanites from the land west of the Jordan, they had been freeing the eastern territory from powerful foes. 3. *Their inheritance would be more complete.* The tabernacle was in the western land. The only place of worship was there. Without a well-conquered west, no full religious service could be enjoyed by the east. The eastern contingent had been making provision for the richest portion of their estate. They, too, wanted a "part in Jehovah" (cf. verses 24, 25, 27). Thus the rest which these men had helped to win for others was so much more rest added to themselves. By serving others, they had secured an estate in safety, an estate in a good conscience, and an estate in the worship of Jehovah. God ever makes us thus dependent on others. To help others is a necessity to ourselves. No man can afford to live without helping some one else. Even of the realm of thought and mental activity, Emerson wrote: "We have social strengths. Our affection towards others creates a sort of vantage or purchase which nothing will supply. I can do that by another, which I cannot do alone. I can say to you what I cannot first say to myself. Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds." It is ever "more blessed to give than to receive." He who imparts possesses. He who helps

others much continually enriches his own inheritance. Nowhere is this so true as in spiritual service. To lead many into the rest of Christ, is to be very rich in the peace which passeth all understanding.

LIVING FOR OTHERS.

Life is nowhere so beautiful as where it is unselfish. The fairest thing in the world is that which is all and altogether for others,—the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In one sense it is true that "No man liveth unto himself;" in another aspect, men are often profoundly selfish. These men, who formed what has been called "the auxiliary force" in this war, spent seven years of their lives for their brethren. They were in the army on behalf of their brethren, and instead of their brethren. They may represent to us several phases of vicarious life.

**I. Vicarious conflicts.** They were fighting in the place of their brethren left on the east of Jordan. They were fighting on behalf of all Israel. Life has many vicarious conflicts. Every soldier who fights for his country, fights in the stead of others. Every true soldier of Jesus is fighting the Lord's battles against sin on behalf of all mankind.

**II. Vicarious service.** All the work of these men was not on the battle-field. Incidentally, during those seven years, they would have helped their brethren in many other ways. In addition to outward services, they were cheering their brethren by their assistance, and setting an example of self-denial to all. And these were the men whose service stands commended as among the noblest offered during the war. He who lives for others now, will find his name no less honourably commended by Jesus Christ. To him, also, it shall presently be said: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

**III. Vicarious suffering.** These forty thousand men were suffering self-denial. They were kept from their wives and families. They had to suffer the weariness of arduous marchings and countermarchings. They had to undergo all the privations common to an army actively engaged. They had to risk the dangers of battle, and probably to suffer the pain of wounds, and of disease brought on by exposure. Partly by their sufferings Israel entered into rest. He who suffers for others enters into the peace of Him "who loved us and gave Himself for us." The Saviour gives us His own glory most fully, when we most completely follow His own example (cf. John xvii. 22). Not as an arbitrary arrangement, but as the outcome of a spiritual law, he who humbly and patiently bears a heavy cross presently possesses a glorious crown.

WAR EXCHANGED FOR PEACE.—There can be nothing more sad than to thoughtfully contemplate an army newly mobilised for war. It is terrible to think of strong men, trained to this grim business, coming together with the deliberate intention of killing as many as they can of other strong men. It is proportionately beautiful to think of an army being disbanded;—thousands of men, marching every one to his home, to keep, and to cultivate, and to enjoy God's good gift of peace. Among the finest fancies of Nathaniel Hawthorne, none is more beautiful than that rich conception of peace which he has embodied in half a line: "Cannon transformed into church bells." One is led to think of the very metal, so lately bellowing thunder and pouring death, as taking an almost sentient share in the holy gladness of peace.

Verse 5.—REASONABLE SERVICE.

This verse may have special reference to what is known as the "Second Law," beginning in Deut. v. It succinctly repeats some of the very phrases of Moses.

God had long fought for the Israelites, and had now given them peace. Joshua pleads with them, very much as Paul pleads with us: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." God's gift of rest was to be answered by their tribute of obedience.

**I. The duty to be done.** "Do the commandment and the law." "Walk in His ways."

**II. The concern to be manifested.** "Take diligent heed to do," etc. 1. *Anxious watchfulness.* 2. *Holy activity.*

**III. The spirit and power of performance.** "Love the Lord your God." Love would help them to discern the law. Love would quicken their activity in doing the law. Love would make them delight in the law.

**IV. The disposition to be cultivated.** 1. *Dependence and constancy.* "Cleave unto Him." Keeping very near to Him, you will less wish to depart from Him. The force of attraction diminishes with the distance of separation. 2. *Humility and fidelity.* "Serve Him." Do not object to serve. Serve Him only.

**V. The honour to be rendered.** 1. *Service with undivided affection.* "Serve Him with all your heart." Love was to render an allegiance wanting nothing in delight and joy. 2. *Service with all the strength of the life.* "And with all your soul." (The word used is *nephesh*, "the breath," "that by which the body lives;" also, "the mind." Compare Gr. ψυχή as opposed to πνεῦμα.) Life was to render an allegiance wanting nothing in mind, nothing in will, and nothing in energy.

More Liberty, and Fresh Obligations to Service.—"Joshua thus releases and frees them from temporary service, that he may bind them for ever to the authority of the one true God. He therefore permits them to return home, but on the condition that wherever they may be they are to be the soldiers of Jehovah; and he at the same time prescribes the mode, namely, the observance of His law."—[*Calvin.*]

Verse 6.—Blessing a Multitude.

**I. In this life men are often blessed in the mass, and seemingly are all blessed alike.** Some of these soldiers merited every good word that was spoken. Probably some deserved no blessing at all. There may have been those in the host who were idle, and careless, and cowardly; who, although they were formally present, sought not to serve men nor to glorify God. It is not possible that equal merit should have prevailed throughout the multitude. Yet all these men were blessed with the same words. The indifferent were blessed in the same words as the earnest; the brave, in the same words as the cowardly. Blessing must needs be unevenly administered in this life. Men cannot judge each other accurately, nor administer favours impartially. Even God blesses men in this same manner. Were everybody to be blessed according to a set scale of merit, goodness would become artificial. 1. *God blesses all men, omitting none.* Over all the vast multitude of the sons of men does He pour the mercies of the day, the mercies of the seasons, and the mercies of revolving years.

> "Yon sun,
> Lights it the great alone? Yon silver beams,
> Sleep they less sweetly on the cottage thatch
> Than on the dome of kings? Is mother earth
> A step-dame to her numerous sons, who earn
> Her unshared gifts with unremitting toil;
> A mother only to those puling babes
> Who, nursed in ease and luxury, make men
> The playthings of their babyhood, and mar,
> In self-important childishness, that peace
> Which men alone appreciate?
> Spirit of Nature! No."

Such, too, is the teaching of the holy Saviour, who tells us of the Father: "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." 2. *In blessing the multitude, God chooses to bless the wicked man too much rather than the faithful man too little.* The words of verses 2, 3, may have been far above the meed of many individual men of these forty thousand. Joshua, however, does not stint the praise of the deserving, lest he should say too much of the undeserving. He blesses the bad bountifully, rather than the good sparingly. God blesses bad men, and good also, far beyond their merits. God never suffers His words of love, or His works of goodness, to fall below our deserts. He ever deals with us in excess of all that we could expect.

**II. The blessings of life, which seem uneven in their distribution, regulate themselves in the act of appropriation.** He who had served with sloth and cowardice would not be able to take into his heart the gladness of Joshua's

words. Only he who had been faithful would much care for these words of praise; only he would be well able to appropriate them. Here, again, it is only the pure in heart who are blessed; only they see God. The sun may rise on the evil and the good, but the good find most gladness in its light. The stars mean more to the godly man than to the "undevout astronomer." The fruitful fields of the wicked never yield so much as even the thinly cropped acres of the righteous. The poverty of God's true servants has more wealth than the riches of the ungodly. A spiritual mind will find more joy in sickness than a sinful man can ever know in health. "Things are not what they seem." God's blessings, scatter them how He will, have a way of righting themselves. It is only by the pious man that they can ever be really gathered.

Verse 7.—THE DIVERGENT WAYS OF LIFE.

**I. Life's separations.** 1. *As a matter of history.* Here was one half of the children of Manasseh going east of the Jordan, and one half staying west. Part of the people were henceforth to be in one country, and part in another. Life is full of similar examples. (*a*) Separated tribes. (*b*) Separated families. (*c*) Separated brethren and companions. 2. *As a matter of necessity.* Numerous families must be forced asunder. The penalty of multiplication is division. Sooner or later, to be many is to be scattered. This is well. Men need that old views and habits should be crossed. New necessities make new minds. New companions form new men. New countries beget new races. The world that makes all her various children needs them all. In their variety they can better help each other.

**II. Life's separations arising imperceptibly.** Where did this division in the family of Manasseh begin? What determined it? On what day was it first noted down, that the one family was henceforth to be known in the nation as consisting of these two halves? What was the first diverting cause? Was it a difference of tastes, as between shepherd life and military life? or what was it which began to turn half the family life in one direction and half in another? Between what members of the family was the line of separation drawn? and what determined the precise bearings through the family in which that line was eventually laid down? All these things are more or less hidden. The things which divide families spring up secretly, and work secretly. Peculiar tastes, particular temptations, distinctive habits, strong prejudices; these, and many other things, are causes of separation. The persecution of the Puritans accounts largely for the America of to-day. The persecution of the French Huguenots has been an immense factor in determining the industrial occupation of Englishmen, and the commercial value of their manufactures. The roving habits of the earlier races that settled in Britain, and the ambition of a Norman duke, laid the foundations of our national life and history.

**III. Life's separations in their importance.** If small causes are influential in determining the separation of families, the separation itself is often of more consequence still. Thus these eastern Manassites prospered and multiplied exceedingly, and, having turned to idolatry, were, with Reuben and Gad, the first to suffer the penalty of captivity (1 Chron. v. 18—26). How responsible is life everywhere! The small thing may be pregnant with mighty issues. He resolves wisely who cries, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel." "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

**IV. Life's separations in relation to life's blessings.** Only the western half of the family dwelt in the Land of Promise. Yet is it written of the eastern half: "When Joshua sent them away also to their tents, then he blessed them." The blessing was not limited by the river. God's blessing is not a mere matter of geography. The members of the family that go, and those that stay, may alike live beneath His smile. There is no place where the

Scriptures may not be the power of God unto salvation. There is no country where "the same Lord is not rich unto all that call upon Him." There is no land yet discovered where believing men may not adoringly say, "The precious blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

Verse 8.—THE DISTRIBUTION OF LIFE'S GAINS.

I. The firstfruits of the war commanded to be offered to the Lord. This was made imperative at the fall of Jericho (chap. vi. 17—19). God says, "My soul desired the first ripe fruit" (cf. Mic. vii. 1; Exod. xxii. 29; Deut. xviii. 4, etc.). This requisition of the Lord is not to enrich Him, but us. He would increase the wealth of our reverence and love and joy in Himself.

II. The chief spoils of the war permitted to be kept by the people. Since the fall of Jericho, and the devoting of its spoil, the Israelites had been allowed to retain that which they took. Even the share of these eastern soldiers enabled them to return with much riches, with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment." God has joy in all the possessions that we can hold rightly. He does but demand a little in order to teach us how to retain the abundance which He loves to leave in our possession.

III. The spoils kept by men to be used in cultivating a spirit well pleasing to God. "Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren." 1. *A spirit of self-sacrifice.* 2. *A spirit of generosity.* 3. *A spirit of pleasure in the joy of others.* Life's gains should be made up of spiritual gettings, spiritual possessions, and spiritual disbursements. The man who so lives can enjoy his capital, not only when he has it, but before it is realized, and after it is paid away.

THE ETHICS OF WAR-SPOIL.—"As it was formerly seen that the greater part of the two tribes were left in their territories beyond Jordan, when the others passed over to carry on the war, it was fair that, as they had lived in ease with their families, or been only occupied with domestic concerns, they should be contented with their own livelihood and the produce of their own labour. And they certainly could not, without dishonesty, have demanded that any part of the booty and spoil should be distributed among them, when they had taken no share in all the toil and the danger. Joshua, however, does not insist on the strictly legal view, but exhorts the soldiers to deal liberally with their countrymen by sharing the prey with them. Here some one may unseasonably raise the question, Whether or not the booty was common? For Joshua does not decide absolutely that it is their duty to do as he enjoins; he admonishes them that, after they have been enriched by the Divine blessing, it would betray a want of proper feeling not to be liberal and kind towards their brethren, especially as it was not their fault that they did not take part in the same expedition. Moreover, when he bids them divide, he does not demand an equal partition, such as that which is usual among partners and equals, but only to bestow something that may suffice to remove all cause of envy and hatred."—[*Calvin.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 9—34.

The remainder of this chapter forms a narrative too closely connected to be altogether broken up in order to meet an arbitrary arrangement, and too long for continuous treatment in a single discourse. The four main themes will therefore be taken first, as indicated below, and the verses afterwards.

### I. THE BUILDING OF THE ALTAR.—*Verses* 9, 10.

PUTTING GOD FIRST.

As has already been intimated, the two and a half tribes erred in not com-

municating with Eleazar and Joshua before erecting this altar. Had they done this, some difficulties would have been avoided, and some pain would have been prevented; but much that is beautiful would thereby have been lost to men and to this history. God gives us a good inheritance even in our mistakes, so long as a holy mind underlies those mistakes. Caution may help to make life untroubled; holy zeal and godly patience ever make it rich. Where cold and watchful propriety makes a smooth road, love, in more erratic and impulsive ways, presently prepares for herself green pastures. Did our mistakes invariably take their rise in love for God and His truth, and were they met in a right spirit, they would, at least sometimes, furnish matter for joy as well as for pain.

On their way back to their homes, these forty thousand men stayed to build this altar. It was a highly religious act. Many considerations might urge them to defer the work. Some other time might be equally suitable for the purposes which they had in view. Pressing reasons might suggest that they should send a body of representative men to build the altar at some future period. But these people resolved on doing the work then and there. Let us see how the case probably presented itself to their minds. Consider: **I. The religious meaning of this act, and the decision which it proclaimed.** What did the two and a half tribes intend to indicate by this altar? What feelings of their own did they wish the altar to express? What influence did they desire the altar to exert upon others? 1. *They meant the altar to bear witness that, in going out of Israel, they did not give up Israel's God.* Their future home was to be out of Canaan proper. Some of the Divine promises pertained to the land itself (Gen. xii. 7; xiii. 14, 17; xv. 7). It is true that the grant had been afterwards given in a more extended form, embracing this eastern land also (Gen. xv. 18—21), yet it was natural to regard the western territory, above all other, as "the place which the Lord had promised." Dwelling already in the eastern possession, Moses reckoned that, failing in being permitted to cross the Jordan before his death, he had fallen short of coming into the actual inheritance (Deut. iv. 22, xxxiv. 4); and this, notwithstanding that God had shewed him "all the land of Gilead unto Dan" (Deut. xxxiv. 1), as being part of the land promised. Thus, it was to avow their determination to keep up their interest in the land where God dwelt between the cherubim, that the eastern tribes set up this altar. They could not give up their part in Jehovah. Building the altar was another way of saying: "We too would continue to sacrifice to the Lord, but we must cross this Jordan ere our sacrifices can be accepted." There are times when young men are called to find homes amid new surroundings. Children of Christian parents are called to settle in life where God is not much known, and where little of worship is offered to His name. Such may find a useful lesson in this altar. Such should say of their fathers' God: "This God is our God for ever and ever." 2. *The two and a half tribes meant this altar to serve as a religious security for their children* (ver. 24, 25). They were taking care of their children's religious privileges. Many would call it inhuman not to provide for their children's future in this life. The same people, in many cases, freely confess that the life to come is far more important; and yet for their children's spiritual future they make no provision whatever. 3. *The building of this altar was, practically, putting God first.* It was the voice of a whole people saying: "Before we do anything else, we will provide for drawing near unto the Lord." The altar was a national anticipation of Ps. xlii. To us it should be a reiteration of the Saviour's word: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness," etc. **II. The attractions that lay in the direction of the earthly and temporal.** 1. *A desire for rest must have been prompting them to hasten to their homes.* Home is sweet to the labourer, to the merchant, to the statesman. It is the place where the weary worker retires for rest. It is associated with grateful memories of rest that has been; and the memories inspire hopes. If home be sweet to the man engaged in the ordinary industries of life, sweeter still must it be to the returning soldier. Yet these men

had higher thoughts than those of mere rest. Their long campaign might have left them weary; their weariness did not prevent them from staying to erect this altar in the interests of their spiritual welfare. The work seems to have been one of considerable extent. It was "a great altar to see to." The Vulgate says, "They built hard by Jordan an altar of vast size." If the conjecture of Lieut. Conder is correct, the remains of this great work are still to be seen. The men might be weary, yet the work was not left for some future time, nor was it hurried over. The claims of the worship of God were pleading within them more urgently than the claims of rest. How often, in our day, worship is made to give place to weariness. 2. *The interest awakened by their new possessions must have acted as an enticement towards home.* There was an estate waiting for them each, and they had not yet even surveyed it. Yet they waited to build this stupendous altar. Chalmers spoke of "the expulsive power of a new affection." Many have found that interest in a new estate has preponderated over interest in religion. When they have bought a piece of ground, they forthwith say, "I must needs go and see it." The newly purchased oxen have to be "proved." With such, affection for earthly things expels regard for spiritual things. With these returning soldiers, the love of God was expelling the love of things. Every stone that they laid was a spiritual prediction of the coming song: "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" 3. *Social feelings were bidding them hasten homewards.* The love of wife and children not greeted for years, of parents long unseen, of brothers and sisters whose faces must have grown almost strange, was yearning within them for satisfaction. Still, they stayed to build this immense altar. The very love of their children's spiritual welfare bade them stay. The time might come when some might say to these children of theirs, "What have ye to do with the Lord God of Israel?" (ver. 24.) Thus, longing for their children all the while, they tarried on the way to care for their children's religious welfare. Nothing should come between us and God: that is what the altar says to us. Nothing should put the worship of God into any second place. Longings for rest, or for business prosperity; longings for home, or for loved ones there, should all give place to our longings after God (cf. Ps. xlii.). **III. The attractions that lay in the direction of the spiritual.** These men put religious interests before their secular interests. To them, spiritual life was higher and more precious than even social life. What led them to act as they did? What were the forces at work within them to determine them to this conduct? 1. *They were moved with gratitude for God's past help.* Jehovah had been so good! Peradventure they thought on their way home of His many marvellous works. By Him had they gotten all those victories. What has God done for us? 2. *They felt a deep enthusiasm towards God.* The gods of their enemies had not been as their God, the enemies themselves being judges. The altar was the outcome of enthusiasm (ἐν Θεός). They were dwelling, as it were, *in God*, by reason of very delight. God had wrought for them right gloriously. The Red Sea; the wilderness; Jordan; Jericho, etc. How could they suffer any possibility of losing their "part in Jehovah"? That fertile land on the east of the Jordan, so very suitable for their flocks, would be dearly bought indeed if they should lose their hold on God! That being so, weariness must be forgotten for a season; the new estate must remain untended a little longer; wife must wait, and children must wait, and their own longing hearts must wait. At all costs, they must keep up their "part in Jehovah." What is God to us? 3. *They had, it may be, great hopes about the worship of God.* They did not know much about it yet. Many of their services in the lonely solitudes of the wilderness had been beautiful. They had served to whet their desire for more. Since crossing the Jordan these forty thousand men had learned to know God better. All Israel had come to know God better. The worship of the future should be more adequate to His great deservings. So these men prepare already to join in it,—prepare both for themselves and for their children. What are our anticipations of God's house?

4. *These men felt a genuine desire to put their present and their future well under the care of God.* God had helped them so gloriously in war; what could they do better than have Him for their helper in a time of peace? Would it not be well to have a peace-part in Him, as well as a war-part? Jehovah of Israel must be glorious elsewhere than on battle-fields! Could they not, in some way, put the new homes and estates in trust to Him? Was it not possible in some manner to consecrate all the new things and the new prospects to the Lord? So they halted there by the river's banks, and "they built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to." What consecration have we made of our present belongings unto God? What preparation have we made for our future part in Him? **IV. The peculiar expression here given to spiritual feeling.** The spiritual had triumphed over the earthly; how could the prominent feeling be best expressed? They built an altar. They did not erect a memorial of their own past prowess. They did not even build a memorial merely in thankfulness to God. They did that, and more. They copied the altar at Shiloh, which represented to them the presence and face of God. They set up that altar within the land of Canaan itself: God could only be approached there. They set it up by "the passage of the children of Israel," and at a convenient ford for crossing towards Shiloh. It was another way of saying, "God can only be approached through sacrifice, and sacrifice can only be offered at His appointed altar" (Deut. xii. 5—14). It is always beautiful to see true love formulating her symbols. How shall love express herself? That depends on the dispensation, on the time, on the surroundings, of him who loves. But love that is true never makes mistakes. It always expresses itself appropriately and significantly. The expression of true love, let it take what form it may, is always beautiful. Cain's sacrifice spoke heterodoxy; not so Abel's. Abraham, after the pattern shewed to him, told his love by lifting the sacrificial knife over his son. Hannah gave her son to the Lord in a life-long service. David told his memory of former deliverances, by using, to meet Goliath, the old sling of his shepherd days. The woman who was a sinner told her love by tears which Jesus said were for the washing of His feet, and by ointment in which Christ saw a beautiful contrast to the cold thoughtlessness of Simon. Mary of Bethany also brought ointment; the Saviour said, "She hath come beforehand to anoint my body to the burying." Mary of Magdala came with her tears to her Lord's grave, and angels were visibly present, as if to acknowledge the fitness of her gift. So the two and a half tribes impulsively erected their altar; and when they had found out its meaning, the children of Israel, with the zealous Phinehas included, were all well pleased (ver. 30, 33). It is our coldness that is awkward and inappropriate. He who loves much generally serves in a way glorifying to his Lord, and instructive to his fellow-men.

## II. THE MISJUDGMENT OF THE ALTAR.—*Verses* 11—20.

### Zeal without Knowledge.

Most commentators on this passage assume that the two and a half tribes were very much to blame, and though some allow that the western tribes were a little too hasty, a general praise is awarded them for what is freely called their "holy wrath." This appears to be an unfair verdict. Doubtless the Reubenites and their brethren would have done well to have communicated with Eleazar before doing an act so open to misconstruction. Yet their error was merely one of oversight. The very fact that they did not think to consult the high priest, suggests that it did not even occur to them that they were doing a wrong thing. As to the work itself, all Israel came presently to be pleased with the thing done, even the zealot Phinehas being no exception. Had the eastern tribes been proved guilty of erecting an altar for sacrifice, it might have been proper to have spoken of the zeal of their western brethren as displaying "holy wrath;" as the record

stands, the wrath appears to have had in it somewhat more of sin than holiness. It was wrong to assume guilt on a mere report, and then rapidly muster for war; it was wrong also for the deputation of princes to make grave charges of terrible sin, when they ought to have made enquiries first, and, if necessary, have proceeded to give reproof afterwards. The eastern tribes erred in a negative form, omitting to do something of which, in the innocence of their hearts, they seem not even to have thought; the western tribes committed a positive sin, judging their brethren with no proof of their guilt, and thus judging them in a matter which was thought to require a wholesale infliction of the penalty of death (cf. ver. 12; Lev. xvii. 8, 9; Deut. xii. 13, 14). It is insufficient to say that the wrath of the nine and a half tribes would have been "holy," had their brethren been really guilty; that is merely saying that the wrath would have been right had certain things happened which never took place.

We see here illustrations of the following things:—

**I. Good men very easily betrayed into hasty and wrong judgments.** "Israel *heard say*, Behold the children of Reuben," etc. It was a report, and the report said, They have built *an altar*. 1. *Here is judgment based merely upon appearances, and thus wrong judgment.* Rumour generally deals with things from without. It often freely attributes motives; it seldom takes pains to understand them. Appearances were much against the eastern tribes. They had built an altar. For what could an altar be erected, if not for sacrifice? To what other use could an altar possibly be put? It was very easy to assume that the ordinary use of an altar was the use intended in this instance. Yet this assumption was wrong. **The outward seemings of human acts are not a safe guide for judgment.**

> "What we oft do best
> By sick interpreters, once weak ones, is
> Not ours, or not allowed; what worst, as oft,
> Hitting a grosser quality, is cried up
> For our best act."—*Shakespeare.*

Through judging by the outward, men have often been extolled where base, and condemned where best. The outward appearance is not only insufficient for righteous judgment, but may be altogether opposed to righteous judgment. The Saviour Himself was continually misjudged by men who had their eyes fastened on things outward. It was when He had once put the Sabbath to the lofty use of healing a man who had been impotent for many years, that the Jews went about to kill Him, and Christ answered them: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." On this, the late F. D. Maurice remarks of the Saviour: "He was giving a lesson to all ages and to all teachers respecting the duty and the method of piercing through the outward shell of an institution into the principle which is embodied in it—respecting the danger of omitting to do this through any affected reverence for the institution itself." The act of the Saviour seemed contrary to the law of the Sabbath; so the act of these trans-Jordanic tribes appeared to be contrary to the unity of worship; yet, in either case, the judgment which condemned these acts was faulty. 2. *Here is wrong judgment, when once formed, actually promoted by supposed zeal for God.* Having started falsely, the very jealousy which these men had for truth impelled them farther astray. The force of zeal is a good force when it is made to act in a right direction. But zeal is not the most clear-sighted of the Christian graces. There is but a step between human zeal and human passion, and men have often crossed the narrow boundary unknown to themselves. History has too often shown anger against men hiding itself under the plea of love to God. Men who give way to "holy wrath" have much need to accompany it with humble prayer. Had Eleazar asked counsel of God, the Israelites would not have been so readily betrayed into a passion against their brethren. We read here of no such prayer and humiliation as that recorded in chap. vii. 6—9. Thus, this "holy wrath" presently turns out to be founded in delusion. The men who so readily deter-

mined that their brethren had sinned, came soon to discover that the error was nearer home. They who knew others so easily, had to find out that they were ignorant of themselves. Greville wrote: "He that sees ever so accurately, ever so finely into the motives of other people's acting, may possibly be entirely ignorant as to his own. It is with the mental as with the corporeal eye, the object may be placed too near the sight to be seen truly, as well as too far off; nay, too near to be seen at all." **II. Wrong judgments speedily leading to false accusations** (ver. 15—20). 1. *Here are mistaken judgments passing out of the minds and hearts that formed them into words and acts.* "They came." "They spake." Men seldom keep long to themselves the opinions in which they condemn others. As in this instance, there are some cases in which it would be wrong to do so. Had the eastern tribes really been guilty of building a second altar for sacrifice, it would have been wrong for their brethren not to have confronted them with their sin. Even when remonstrance is not deemed necessary, men who conclude some evil against a fellow seldom keep their conclusion to themselves. The judgments that are formed in a man's heart cannot be kept there. Men's opinions of some evil in their brethren are expressed in many ways—now by looks, now by a significant silence, now by words, and at other times by deeds. No man should recklessly allow, even to his own heart, that his brother is guilty. Such conclusions are difficult to keep, and he worst keeps them who most readily entertains them. 2. *Here are opinions hastily adopted, and just as badly communicated.* We see in Phinehas and the ten princes the following mistakes:—(*a*) *Accusation instead of enquiry.* They call this building of the altar "a trespass," "a turning away from following the Lord," and "a rebellion." (*b*) *Painful comparisons instead of an opportunity for explanation.* It was not enough for Phinehas to begin his address with such hard words; in his vehemence, he gives no room for any answer till he has compared these brave men, so lately sent away with words of high praise from Joshua, to the vilest of the sinners known in the history of the people. They are put side by side with the transgressors of Peor, among whom Phinehas himself had so boldly vindicated the honour of his God. They are named, also, with Achan, who had so selfishly and grievously transgressed. (*c*) *A contemplation of the judgments of God as likely to be provoked by the sins of others, and no thought of them in connection with their own sins* (ver. 18, 20). Good men are very ready to fear that the sins of some one else are likely to provoke the displeasure of the Lord. The best of men are too apt to forget to ask themselves how God may be regarding their own lives. 3. *Here are the bad judgments of good men having about them some conspicuous redeeming features* (ver. 19). The proposition that the eastern tribes should pass over and inherit among their brethren west of Jordan very beautifully softens the otherwise harsh character of these proceedings. It shews that the western tribes did not contemplate war as an absolute necessity, even if their brethren had sinned, but only if they should prove obdurate. It shews in light at once clear and beautiful, that the moving spirit of this remonstrance was to be found in love to God, and in jealousy for His commandment. It shews that the western tribes were unselfish, and, indeed, very generous—ready both to undertake the wearisome task of a fresh division of the land, and to suffer, for the sake of their brethren and God's truth, that their own inheritances should be very materially diminished. No man's godliness is seen everywhere. Our very love to God has its defects. All true godliness will shew itself somewhere. Let a Christian man commit an error ever so great, yet, if he be really a Christian, his love to God and holiness will find places in which it is constrained to assert itself, the error notwithstanding. **III. The mistakes of zeal threatening to become far more disastrous than the mistakes of love.** The error of the eastern tribes had in it nothing of that energy of mischief which was so prominent in the zeal of the Israelites of the west. The love of the one people was impulsive in its ardour towards God, and thus too thoughtless for the feelings of men, but it did not intend harm to any one; the

zeal of the other people began by proposing a war. It is ever thus. The wrongs to men arising from ardent love to God have never been comparable to the injury wrought by zeal for God's truth. Love usually wrongs herself quite as much as she harms men generally; while zeal for purity of doctrine systematically and continuously directs her energy against others. Peter cried, "That be far from Thee, Lord," and brought down upon himself his Lord's sore rebuke. James and John vehemently asked, "Wilt Thou not that we call down fire from heaven?" proposing to vindicate the Saviour's honour in the ashes of a village, and in the dying groans of burning men and women and little children. The love of men to God has often found them making serious mistakes, and inadvertently causing much suffering; the zeal of zealots has baptized the path of the Church with blood through all generations.

### III. THE VINDICATION OF THE ALTAR.—*Verses* 21—29.

#### The Self-defence of the Innocent.

It has been said that "a man's character is like his shadow, which sometimes follows, and sometimes precedes him, and which is occasionally longer, occasionally shorter than he is." Thus, too, is it with the character of these Israelites. A short time before, Joshua had spoken to them words of commendation; perhaps of higher commendation, in some instances, than was deserved. Here the estimation of character errs on the other side. These men are accused where they are not guilty. Let us see how they bear the accusation thus brought against them. I. Innocent men shewing extreme sensitiveness under a charge of great sin. They speak as men deeply wounded. The language is broken, abrupt, and fervent (cf. Crit. Notes). *Is it natural for innocent men to shew such sensitiveness under false charges?* Undoubtedly it is. Some people assume that the natural bearing of innocence is calmness. They are ready to conclude that a man is most likely guilty if he is very sensitive, and probably innocent if he is undisturbed. Much must depend on the temperament of the person accused. Coolness may be only the measure of hypocrisy, and sensitiveness may be only the natural expression of horror at the thought of guilt. Shakespeare wrote:

> "The purest treasure mortal times afford
> Is spotless reputation; that away,
> Men are but gilded loam or painted clay."

When so much is at stake, it is not wonderful if those who fear to lose should make that concern very manifest. *Is it right for innocent men to shew such sensitiveness under false charges?* Undoubtedly, it is not only natural, but right also. Not long since, a prominent German politician, replying to the slanders of the press directed against public characters, and answering those who told him that ministers ought not to mind the calumnies spoken against them, was warmly cheered as he exclaimed in the German Parliament: "God keep us from a breed of statesmen with hearts of lead and hides of leather. Let us have men whose blood moves to their cheeks when lies are flung in their faces; for it is no ideal of mine to become acclimatised to liars." Whatever may be thought of the strength of the language thus used, no one can deny the correctness of the sentiment which the language contains. Patience should have "her perfect work" everywhere; but patience was never intended to find its consummation in a dull phlegmatic mood, which should be equally insensible to praise or blame. A Christian man is especially called to be patient, even under false accusations, but he also has especial reasons for deep and sensitive concern. The honour of his Lord is affected by his disgrace. A Christian man charged with grievous sin is charged with bringing shame upon a name far higher than his own. These falsely accused Israelites seem to have keenly felt the unjust words of their brethren in this light. He whose life is a striving against sin, cannot but feel

acutely when he is unjustly accused of having forfeited his good name, wronged his brethren, and dishonoured his God. II. **Innocent men energetically defending themselves from this false charge.** It has been said that reputation is often "got without merit, and lost without deserving." Few men, however their reputation may have been won, consent to part with it without some effort in its defence. There may be times when it may be well to remember that "no man is ever written down but by himself." A few of our fellows may be privileged to take the lofty stand of an aged man, who, when asked to answer some attack upon his character, replied: "For many years my character has taken care of itself, and I am not going to begin to defend it now." Most men, however, will at times be driven to feel that such defence of their reputation is both legitimate and necessary. It was thus with these Israelites. The leaders of these forty thousand men felt that their repudiation of this charge was due to themselves, due to all the host with them, and due to their brethren whom they had just rejoined in their new inheritance. 1. *Their defence contained several abrupt appeals to God.* There was an appeal to God's knowledge. The mighty God, the God, Jehovah; the mighty God, the God, Jehovah, He knoweth." They made their appeal to Him who was the "strong God," and could punish them; to Him who was the God, and whose majesty placed Him high above all the pretended gods of the surrounding nations; and, not least, to Him who was Jehovah of Israel, and knew all things. There were, also, appeals to God's judgment: "Save us not this day;" "Let the Lord Himself require it." No one should lightly invoke God. It should be remembered that the charge here was a very solemn one, and that it amounted to an accusation of having renounced God. It was under these circumstances that these men boldly said, in effect: If we have departed from Jehovah, let not Jehovah save us. 2. *Their defence supplied a sufficient reason for the thing which they had done* (verses 24—28). They had built the altar for reasons very opposite to those laid to their charge; it was not to depart from God, but to enable them to cleave to God. They had built it, not only to keep a part in God secure for themselves, but to secure a heritage for their children. Thus they not only deny the attributed motive, but supply the real one. 3. *Their defence shews them cherishing no bitterness, and refraining from all recrimination.* It is well that they say not too little; it is better still that they refrain from saying too much. They might justly have rebuked their accusers for undue haste, and for unkind and harsh charges of terrible sin. But not a single word of the kind falls from their lips. Their words, it is true, are the words of men deeply wounded, but there is nothing which betrays anger or bitterness towards their unjust brethren. Apart from the patient silence of the Saviour Himself, perhaps there is no instance in the entire Scriptures which more beautifully shews how wounded innocence may defend itself without transgression. Acute feeling and warmth of expression are not necessarily sinful. It is when warmth passes into indignation against others, leading us to cherish bitter thoughts towards them, that we sin against that love of God which requires that we never forget to love our brethren.

### IV. THE GENERAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE ALTAR.—*Verses* 30—34.

#### Fear Giving Place to Joy.

We have already had occasion to remark upon the honourable spirit displayed, in one thing, by the deputation from the ten tribes. If their brethren felt their inheritance to be "unclean," they cheerfully offered to make room for them on the other side of Jordan. Hardly less praiseworthy is the readiness in which they cheerfully accepted the explanation offered by the eastern tribes. It would have been grateful to have found them actually acknowledging their undue haste; on the other hand, no words of reproach are recorded as having been uttered against the two and a half tribes for their undoubted fault of not communicating

with Eleazar before building the altar. The princes, moreover, do not wait till they have referred this new explanation to the authorities at Shiloh. They accept on the spot the motive for building the altar: "it pleased them" (ver. 10). Later on, all the people join in this verdict: "the thing pleased the children of Israel; and the children of Israel blessed God" (ver. 33).

Thus the guiltless, sooner or later, are ever vindicated. A patient explanation, without bitterness, would go far to reconcile half the enmities of life in the very hour of provocation. If not then, the innocent only require time for their righteousness to be brought forth as the light. False accusations, to mailed innocence, are like tragedy daggers; they may be driven home with a force which, apparently, cannot be resisted, but, sheathing themselves backwards in their own handles, they leave those who are attacked unharmed.

The pleasure which was so readily expressed by the ten tribes and their representatives forcibly illustrates the following points of interest:—I. **Joy in the exculpation of accused brethren.** The princes and the people were glad to know that their brethren were found guiltless. This pleasure in the innocence of their brethren goes far to redeem their former hastiness from reproach. It shews an entire absence of malice, and of any desire to find an occasion against the eastern tribes. It shews an unmistakable zeal *for God*, albeit the zeal had manifested itself in an intemperate and reckless manner. 1. *God is the true bond of brotherhood, and therefore God is more than our brethren.* The distance to which a man gets from God is so much distance from his fellows. To the man who lives in God, all men become brethren; to the man who ignores God, even his nearest kin are but aliens, who are tolerated because of the necessities of life, or because they may minister to his own selfish enjoyment. Brutality is only another name for being far from God; brotherhood is a synonym for nearness to God. This is so even among men who have never heard of God by name; it becomes so, manifestly and appreciably, among those to whom God has been made known. Thus to the ten tribes God was more than their brethren. It was He who had caused the brotherhood. So even the western half of the tribe of Manasseh were prepared to cast off their own family; yea, if necessary under the peculiar conditions of that ancient theocracy, they were prepared to assist in slaying their brethren, rather than suffer them to initiate a movement which might soon lead all Israel to reject Jehovah. God is the fount from which all true brotherhood springs. The fountain may be hidden among the eternal hills, as God, even by name, is hidden from the heathen, but the refreshing waters of brotherly feeling are from Him, notwithstanding. The law in the heart is from Him, whether it has been published and formulated into a system, or not. God is the centre around whom all brotherly feelings revolve, and He is the influence by which they are so moved and so sustained. God, then, is more than our brethren. If we are really called to choose between Him and a brother, the very spirit of brotherhood itself bids us to reject any man for the love of Him by whom all men become brethren indeed. 2. *If we are true brethren, our brother's shame and pain will be ours also.* The reaction of feeling described in these verses shews that the ten tribes were moved by grief, and not animated by malice. Had the trans-Jordanic tribes been guilty, and obstinate in their guilt, and had they been exterminated by their brethren, men would have pointed to this as a dark and more than suspicious page in this history. Thousands would never have cared to understand that it was possible for half a nation to be full of sorrow and sympathy while smiting the other half unto death. But this sudden burst of joy is like the outshining of a great light; it discovers, unmistakably, a pre-existing sorrow, which, while held in restraint by zeal for God, was as great as the after gladness. The measure of the joy seen here is the fair measure of the sorrow felt before. It is the *true* measure of that sorrow; for these spontaneous outbursts of feeling from thousands of men at once are things beyond the reach of hypocrisy. Thus we are taught to sorrow for pain which it may be necessary to inflict. True brother-

hood may not be able to spare the cause for tears, yet it ever weeps with those who weep. 3. *If we are true brethren, the re-established innocence of those suspected of guilt will work in us a gladness both hearty and unfeigned.* Like the shepherd with the one sheep, the woman with the piece of silver, and the father with the prodigal, we shall rejoice over that which was apparently lost, and is again found, even more than over that which had manifestly been kept. **II. Joy in the knowledge that sin has not been committed.** 1. *Sin should be hated for its own sake.* It is a bitterness which nothing can sweeten. Faber well wrote: "It is a great thing gradually to grow into the conviction that there is no real sorrow in the world but sin; that we have no real enemy but sin, in others as well as in ourselves, in prayer as well as in action. This is just the one work we have to do, and is just the one work which is worth doing." We have most of us need to get more into the spirit of Chrysostom, who when angrily threatened with banishment by the wife of Theodosius II., calmly said to her messenger: "Go and tell the empress I fear nothing but sin." Did we but know sin as it is, we should hate it with undying hatred. 2. *Sin should be hated because it robs men of vast blessings.* The Israelites feared that it would rob them even of God. Sin poisons all the soul's joys, and feeds upon the soul's very life. Sin is stolen life in corruption. Sin is death. Men shun the disease which leaves them a dead body in the place of a living friend, and they say of the body itself, Let me bury my dead out of my sight; yet men too often welcome the sin which leaves them with a dead soul, and act as though they felt little the poorer for having a soul so lifeless. 3. *Sin should be hated because it is displeasing to God.* The Israelites were so jealous because of what God might think of this altar, which they concluded had been built for sacrifice. God had so many claims on them. God had loved them so much, and done such great things for them, that they were glad in His pleasure, and sorrowful in His displeasure. The cross stands for more than the wilderness, and our pain in grieving God might well exceed that of these Israelites. 4. *He who hates sin must be careful not to hate the sinner.* Though utterly mistaken about the meaning of the altar, and using words of sharp reproof to the men whom they took to be so guilty, the princes manifest throughout a warm concern for their brethren's welfare. Actual sin must be often sternly reproved, and, it may be, severely punished in the person of the transgressor, but nothing can ever justify us in hating men. There is not a single man whom we have any authority to hate. Every one of our fellows is a being made in God's image. There is no one who, by God's grace, may not yet become an angel of light. Even with Judas the Saviour pleaded tenderly to the last. **III. Joy in freedom from sin as supplying an indication of the Lord's presence** "This day we perceive that the Lord is among us, because ye have not committed this trespass against the Lord." In the absence of sin they found an argument for the presence of God. 1. *When sin is freely indulged in, men may safely assume that God is not with them.* Both the Father and the Son abide only with those who keep the Divine words (John xiv. 23). Sooner or later, every Saul who persists in disobedience has to say, "The Lord is departed from me, and answereth me no more." 2. *The very fact that sin is absent, tells of a present God.* The yearning heart that walks in the light, and longs for more light, need not ask for mighty signs of the Lord's presence; He is never far withdrawn from such. The sun even in the time of summer may be hidden behind the clouds, but the mildness of the atmosphere and the fruitfulness of the earth alike agree in betraying the season. So the ardour of warm love, the simplicity of unquestioning faith, the gladness of holy joy, the spirit of urgent prayer, and all forms of hunger and thirst after righteousness, tell of the nearness of God. God may not be seen in marvellous and exciting signs, but these quieter things are no less signs, and signs which may be equally trusted. When spiritual life is full and fruitful, we may ever be sure that it has not been severed from its connection with Him who is the great source of that life. **IV. Joy in averted judgment.**

The ten tribes were glad together that God was not angry with their brethren. They were also glad that they were not called to execute against a part of the nation the solemn commandment of Jehovah (Lev. xvii. 3, 4; Deut. xiii. 6—18). This is nothing less than joy in the deliverance of men who had seemed in great peril. It is akin to the joy of salvation, of the expression of which the Scriptures are so full. Angels rejoice when judgment is averted by a sinner's conversion. Here the joy of the ten tribes was full, because what had appeared to be a necessary judgment was found not to have been deserved. There are no songs so exalted in their gladness as those which express delight in men delivered from death. The new song before the throne is also a song of salvation. Joy in its relation to men can be set to no higher theme than the deliverance of men from sin and suffering and death.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 9.—The Delayed Inheritance.

**I. An inheritance completely won, but nevertheless long delayed.** The land of Gilead and Bashan had been conquered for several years (cf. Numb. xxi. 21—35). No enemies remained to prevent possession.

**II. An inheritance promised by God, but to be possessed through the faithful obedience of men.** "According to the word of the Lord." Though the Lord had promised this land, the two and a half tribes had promised faithful service (Numb. xxxii. 16—33). The service rendered had nothing to do with actually winning their own inheritance. That was won already.

**III. An inheritance patiently waited for, through years of faithful service, and thus more fully enjoyed at last.** They returned to possess it, enjoying the praise of Joshua, and glad in the consciousness that they had ardently striven to do the will of the Lord.

Verse 10.—Things to be done for God.

**I. Things to be done for God are things to be done first.** Nothing should take precedence of that which we owe to the Lord. There can be no duty even to wife or children of sufficient importance to come between us and Him to whom we owe both our life and theirs.

**II. Things to be done for God are things to be done unanimously.** "The children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh," each joined in the work. The accord was unbroken. No single dissentient voice rises to break in upon the perfect harmony of the history. Nothing is more incongruous than strife in the expression of praise and thankfulness to God; and yet, on the question of how it shall be rendered, have arisen the bitterest and bloodiest strifes of men.

**III. Things to be done for God are things to be done with all our hearts.** They built "a great altar to see to." A small and insignificant work would not serve to express their ardent feeling. The only contention which we can imagine in this work is one against limiting too closely the area on which the altar should be built; or the children of the tribes might enter into a holy rivalry in the rapidity of their toil, and contend, if at all, which of them should lay the last stone. The whole work seems to have been an ardent labour of grateful love.

**IV. Things to be done for God are things to be done with prudence.** Ardour is not enough. Fervour should be combined with wisdom. What we intend by our works is important; how others may interpret them is of great consequence also.

Verses 9, 10.—Cleaving unto the Lord.

Moses had repeatedly charged the children of Israel to cleave unto the Lord their God (Deut. iv. 4, x. 20, xi. 22, xiii. 4, xxx. 20). The two and a half tribes are here seen faithfully obeying this commandment. We see in these verses:—

**I. Men leaving much, but still possessing God. 1.** *Leaving their brethren.*

2. *Leaving the place where they had helped to win many victories.* 3. *Leaving a land where they had been blessed with much of Jehovah's gracious aid.* 4. *Leaving the place of God's more manifest abode* (Shiloh). With all this left behind, they still retained their possession in the Lord Himself. Whatever we are called to forsake, we need not leave Him.

**II. Men possessing God, and esteeming their inheritance in Him above all else that they had.** 1. *Above home comforts.* 2. *Above their dearest relatives.* 3. *Above their earthly estate.* 4. *Above the estate which had been given them by God Himself.* Some extol God merely with the praise of the lips. That is true worship, in which men extol Him in the deeds of their daily lives. Many worship far more devoutly in the market and the shop than others do in the temple.

**III. Men possessing God for themselves, and anxious to secure for their children the same exalted inheritance.** The altar was not merely a memorial of the past, but still more a witness for the future. It was partly an expression of the spiritual life of the men that built it; it was still more for their children (ver. 24—27). He who delights much in the Lord will desire that others, and especially his own children, may be sharers in his joy.

Verses 11, 12.—The Misunderstood and Misreported Deeds of Men.

**I. A good work misapprehended and presently misreported.** 1. *The work was misunderstood.* Some one saw the two and a half tribes erecting this pile. Probably he heard the word "altar" repeatedly used. The "altar" was ever so unlike the altar at Shiloh, it is true: that was made of brass, this of earth and stones; that was comparatively small, while this was very large indeed. But then the builders themselves called it "an altar," and forthwith the observer concluded it was for the purpose of offering sacrifices. Many good deeds of good men have fared no better at the hands of their fellows. Thousands of noble acts have been and still are being misinterpreted. The world is full of monuments which have never been understood, and the very inscriptions on which have been perpetually misread. The motives of the human mind are often written in symbols as puzzling as the old cuneiform records, but the pedantry of the ignorant pronounces the vision to be quite "plain upon the tables," and forthwith the so-called readers "run" to make their report. The fine art galleries, in which are hung up the more highly wrought deeds of life's noblest thinkers and workers, are continually frequented by very pronounced judges who, in this department, hardly know a group in a church from a landscape in Babylon itself. They "see men as trees walking." Even when the Lord Himself is anointed, and is well-pleased with the spiritual beauty of the deed, some indignant murmurer is pretty certain to be standing by, who, as though there could be no room for a second opinion, will unhesitatingly look upon the expended ointment, and call it "this waste." Men are continually finding spiritual palaces in what are only moral ruins, and regarding as mere *débris* humble and holy deeds, in which devouter eyes discern a temple to the Lord. While men are so misapprehended by their fellows, let none be discouraged. It is written of Him who shall judge them finally, "He knew what was in man." Christ reads the work in the light of the worker. 2. *This misunderstood work was promptly calumniated.* Before the two and a half tribes had well done building their altar, "the children of Israel heard say" what the altar meant. Evil tidings spread apace. Those who bear them are like Ahimaaz and Cushi, who both ran their very fastest. It is still worse to have to remember that the "good man" sometimes distances the bad, not merely as a courier of misfortune, but as one who carelessly, or otherwise, perverts the truth. "Calumny is like the Greek fire used in ancient warfare, which burnt unquenched beneath the water, or like the weeds which when you have extirpated them in one place are sprouting forth vigor-

ously in another spot, at the distance of many hundred yards; or, to use the metaphor of St. James, it is like the wheel which catches fire as it goes, and burns with a fiercer conflagration as its own speed increases; 'it sets on fire the whole course of nature' (literally, the wheel of nature). You may tame the wild beast, the conflagration of the American forest will cease when all the timber and the dry underwood is consumed; but you cannot arrest the progress of that cruel word which you uttered carelessly yesterday or this morning,—which you will utter perhaps before you have passed from this church one hundred yards: that will go on slaying, poisoning, burning beyond your own control, now and for ever." [*F. W. Robertson.*] It should be remembered that not only the altars which men build, but also the idle words which men speak, are presently to be matters for an irreversible judgment.

**II. Judgment founded on appearances and on rumour, instead of after enquiry.** (Cf. p. 315.) "Ephemeron, that insect of a day, related to its youthful kindred in its expiring voice how it had seen the coeval sun arise in early youth, climbing up the east, but now that that sun was surely sinking in the western sky, an awful catastrophe or a final night might be safely predicted. The ephemeron expired; but the next day the sun arose in the east as brilliantly as ever; before sundown, however, there were other expiring ephemera predicting, as before, his final extinction." Thus, like the fabled insect of a day, do men judge from appearances, while they see but a small part of the things on which they so confidently pronounce.

**III. War threatened hastily, and without sufficient occasion.** The accusation was incorrect, and had ultimately to be abandoned. 1. *A war threatened in the name of religion.* The object of preventing idolatry was good; the measures set on foot for the purpose were very terrible. Whatever might be said to justify the ten tribes, the Saviour has unhesitatingly pronounced against any attempt to uphold His kingdom by the sword. 2. *A war threatened for want of a right word.* The two and a half tribes had themselves called their memorial "an altar" (ver. 26, *mizbēach*); afterwards, though still regarding it as an altar, they termed it "a witness" (*ēd*). Had the later name been given to it at the first, no misunderstanding might have arisen, and no war might have been threatened. Not a few of the conflicts of life spring from first impressions; and these, in their turn, from names. Small things lead to great issues. 3. *A war averted by patient words of explanation.* The manner in which grave charges are met is of even more consequence than the charges themselves.

Verses 16—19. — NARROW-MINDED JUDGMENT AND LARGE-HEARTED LOVE.

**I. The onesidedness of human judgment.** The view taken both by the ten tribes and their delegates was partial and narrow. 1. *The act was judged apart from its motive.* The judges looked wholly at the altar, and not at all at the heart. 2. *The many were led by the opinion of the few.* The leaders seem to have made up their minds, and they were blindly followed by the nation. "Thus saith the whole congregation." The power of one man to influence a multitude. 3. *Past sin was remembered in one aspect, only to rush into an opposite extreme in another direction.* "Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us?" At Peor there was too great laxity. For a time, no man reproved his brother, and no man sought to stay manifest and abounding iniquity. Here half a nation hastens to accuse the other half for a sin which had not been committed.

**II. The vehemence of religious zeal.** Men never call names so firmly and unhesitatingly as when they upbraid their fellows for a departure from the truth. These brave soldiers, who for seven years had been proving their faithfulness to Joshua, to Israel, and to God, are in one short half-hour termed trespassers, and rebels, and provokers of Divine wrath. Many commentators commend the ten tribes for their wisdom and prudence in sending this deputation before entering on a religious war. As if this war of words and these terrible accusa-

tions of sin were free from guilt. The ten tribes could hardly do less than enquire before drawing the sword. They had been solemnly commanded to do that (Deut. xiii. 14). Instead of doing the bidding of Moses to "enquire, and make search, and ask diligently," Phinehas and his followers accuse most harshly.

**III. The comprehensiveness and beauty of love.** The narrow mind may go with a large heart. They who charged their brethren so recklessly, were willing to deny themselves to provide their brethren a home (ver. 19). With their minds these men could only view the conduct of their brethren from one side. With their hearts the outlook was far broader. We see here: 1. *The beauty of love to God.* 2. *The beauty of love for truth.* 3. *The beauty of love towards those who were sincerely thought to be offending brethren.* He who loves much will often find his heart giving good help where his understanding fails.

"Precipitate bloodthirstiness is not consistent with true religion; for how can He who Himself would not break the bruised reed, allow us either to bruise that which is whole, or break that which is bruised, or burn up the broken?" (Isa. xliii. 3.)

"In cases which are ambiguous and uncertain, it is better to let the judgment stand suspended than to act contrary to love" (1 Cor. xiii. 7.—[*Hedinger.*]

"It is a foolish and dangerous thing for people to think their former sins little—too little for them, as those do who add sin to sin, and so 'treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.' Let therefore the time past suffice."—[*Matt. Henry.*]

Verse 20.—ONE SINNER AND MANY SUFFERERS.

**I. Sin punished in the person of the offender.** "That man perished." 1. *Sin works death in the sinner.* Every wound or disease in the body is so much weakening of the physical life. Every sin is so much taken away from spiritual life. Few things impair spiritual life more completely than covetousness, the sin of which Achan was guilty. Scripture gives us not a few instances of its fatal power. "'Take heed, and beware of covetousness.' Manifestly this was 'the error of Balaam.' He looked at Balak's bribe till it fascinated him. The 'love of money' besieged and corrupted his affections. Mammon threw his golden toils around him. And how baleful and disastrous was the working of the spell, the story reveals. What a thing of discord and contradictions his heart became! how false and inconsistent was the part he played! and how unspeakably awful were the final issues of his avarice! Standing therefore over Balaam's blighted character; standing over the corses of the four-and-twenty thousand that were smitten with the plague at Baal-peor; and standing, finally, over the dead body of the prophet, as its oozing blood reddens the battle-field of Midian, we read this lesson, vivid as an electric flash, 'Take heed, and beware of covetousness.'" [*T. Akroyd.*] Gehazi, Judas, Achan, and others, teach us no less terribly how all the higher feelings of the heart fade away and perish under this love of gain. 2. *Sin brings death to the sinner.* God often takes away the life that is wedded to wickedness, in order to quicken in a final penitence that higher life which sin has well-nigh extinguished.

**II. Sin punished, and the innocent involved with the guilty.** "That man perished *not alone* in his iniquity." The Lord was wroth with all the congregation, and thirty-six of the people were slain before Ai, because of Achan's sin. The argument of Phinehas deals with facts of history, and is not to be read as a mere expression of his own personal opinion. 1. *Scripture shews us many other cases in which the innocent are involved with the guilty.* A notable instance is that in which seventy thousand men were slain on the occasion of David's sin in numbering the people. David himself was oppressed by the thought, and cried out: "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done?" Almost every case of sin of which the Scriptures give any record shews, however, that the suffering wrought by sin

reaches out far beyond the sinner. Joseph's brethren well-nigh break the heart of Jacob. The sons of Eli and Samuel bring judgment upon all the land. Saul sins, and the kingdom suffers throughout. The sin of Eden involves the world. 2. *Like things continually happen in daily life now.* The murderer gives way to passion, and not only is the victim made to suffer, but the families of both victim and murderer also. The sin of carelessness in a miner, a chemist, an engineer, or a railway signalman may place an entire neighbourhood in mourning. In this life, the drunkard and the thief often bring more woe to their families than even to themselves. The ambition of rulers has strewn miles of battle-ground with the dead of their own and other nations. This is no mere question of theology, confined to the Bible, on which sceptics, with a mercy improvised for the occasion, may come and pour forth their scorn. All history, all life, and the very recognition of anything which we can term law, join to tell us that "No man liveth unto himself." Peradventure this is the one appropriate inscription which could stand over the tomb of every conspicuous sinner: "That man perished not alone in his iniquity."

"Each creature holds an insular point in space:
Yet what man stirs a finger, breathes a sound,
But all the multitudinous beings round,
In all the countless worlds, with time and place
For their conditions, down to the central base,
Thrill, haply, in vibration and rebound,
Life answering life across the vast profound,
In full antiphony."—*E. B. Browning.*

This is not a question of theology; it is simply a question of men standing very close together. God has bound us to each other in so many sensitive and close interests, that the offence of one man is ever the wound of many of his fellows.

III. **Sin committed, and the innocent contaminated and punished also.** Achan's sons and daughters were probably stoned and burned with him. As Keil has pointed out, concerning chap. vii. 25, 26: "It does not necessarily follow from the use of the singular suffixes that only Achan was stoned, and not his children; on the contrary, the singular is used interchangeably with the plural because Achan was the person most prominent in the punishment, and therefore he is repeatedly mentioned alone." It is at least possible that the children of Achan may have been aware of their father's sin, and that they thus became accessories after the fact. Sin not only brings punishment to the innocent, it often tempts them, and presently makes them as guilty as the original offender.

"'Tis not their own crimes only, men commit:
They harrow them into another's breast,
And he, too, reaps the growth with bitter pain."

It is of no avail for the guilty to say: "Others should not be influenced." Tempting, as well as sinning, is the work of the devil.

1. *The sins we have committed are still at work.* Nothing is lost in the world of nature. Nothing is lost in the world of morals. Sin will work on after he who committed it is dead. It needs eternity to spend itself. 2. *Every man's past life calls for deep humiliation.* "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Our sins may have had to do with the criminal who was executed yesterday, and with the culprit who has been convicted today. Some of the dead around us all may be of our own killing. He who will think that out fairly for himself can have few reasons for pride and conceit. Before men, and before God, the bearing of us each might well be very humble. 3. *The claims of life are not so urgent in the direction of regrets about the past, as in that of earnest service for the future.* The guilt of the past should be present enough to make us humble, but he will use it unwisely who finds in it only a call to shame and tears. It should move us to holy work, "if by any means we may save some." If the past is working death, the future should be spent as a holy counteractive, leading men by the grace of God to eternal life.

Verses 22, 23. — RIGHTEOUSNESS WAITING FOR THE LIGHT.

**I. The devout heart rejoicing in the consciousness that it is known of God.** "The Lord God of gods, He knoweth." The guilty shrink from God. When Adam has sinned, he hides. "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light" (John iii. 20). He who knows that he is innocent, waits for the light with joy" (Ps. xxxvii. 6).

**II. The devout heart confident that it will presently be judged aright by men.** "And Israel he shall know." "From over the gateway of a continental city some plaster had broken away, revealing an inscription cut in the solid stone. In the days when popery was prevalent, the inscription had been covered over; many years afterwards, the plaster falling down, men drew near and read in the words which it had nidden, 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.' Time is on the side of truth." [*C. Standford.*] Time is no less on the side of truth in relation to character. When the plaster of prejudice or of unwise haste has fallen away, the fellow of the innocent "he also shall know."

**III. The devout heart boldly and reverently appealing to God for its vindication.** "Save us not this day." "Let the Lord Himself require it." Thus Job waited for the vindication of God (Job xix. 25, 26). Seneca said, "Some men, like pictures, are fitter for a corner than a full light." A wiser than Seneca said of others, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light."

Verses 24—27.—PARENTAL FORECAST.

**I. Parents anticipating their children's future temptations.**

**II. Parents endeavouring to provide for their children's part in God.**

**III. Parents unconsciously making their own piety a monument and a witness against their children's sin.**

Verses 27—29.—MONUMENTAL RECORDS.

**I. The work of a man's life is a monument reared aloft in the world.** The variety of this world's monuments: as seen in our city squares; as seen in our records of history; as seen in human lives now surrounding us. Some are building with gold, silver, precious stones; some with wood, hay, stubble. The monument which transcends all others in its loftiness, purity, and beauty, is the life of Christ.

**II. The monument of every man's life is a witness.** 1. *It is a witness of his personal relation to God.* These men did not erect their pile to the praise and glory of their own brave work in the war. In this light, so far as the altar witnessed of its builders, it told of their admiration of God and gratitude to God. 2. *It is a witness of his relation to his family.* The life will tell of wise care or sinful carelessness for the spiritual welfare of the household. 3. *It is a witness of his relation to his fellow-citizens.* He has worked with the nobler of them for the common good, or he has stood apart with the idle and the worthless.

**III. The monument of a good man's life speaks eloquently.** 1. *This monument embodied old yearnings.* It was so much consolidated passion. It was religious love, and fervour, and sympathy, and longing, perpetuated in stone. 2. *This monument represented long and severe toil.* It was the outcome of work there upon the spot. It was built, as it were, upon the pedestal of all the previous toil in the seven years' war. It was also expressive of the determination of the builders to take future journeys to Shiloh for the worship of the Lord. 3. *This monument would go on speaking after the builders were dead.* Such also is the life-work of every true man. He being dead, it yet speaketh.

**IV. These monuments which men thus build may, for a time, be misinterpreted.** The interpretation of the "witness" is not wholly with the builders. It depends no less on the men who behold the monument. They may "hear say" a great deal that the builders never so much as thought of. They may utterly fail to interpret the love and yearning and holy gratitude which the monument embodies. The eyes that read may be too dim to see the things that are written. The minds and hearts that criticise may be too dull

and cold to interpret the eloquent tones which nobler hearts would hear distinctly and appreciate warmly. If Pharisees be the interpreters, then, though it be the life of the Son of God Himself on which they look, they will merely say, "He is a Samaritan, and hath a devil." The monument of a life is what that life is before God; the monument of a life to any individual beholder is only what the beholder can make of it. A dull reader never finds more than a dull monument. Phinehas will detect the passion and fervour of the monument, but, in his rash haste and false zeal, he will be in danger, for a time, of calling it idolatrous. Many interpret only by the interpretation of others. Looking at the lives of their fellows, men are very like young people in a picture gallery; they see what the leading critics have seen, and reiterate, with due technical precision, what the leading critics have said. Thousands have got no farther than this in their interpretation of the lives of men like Henry Martyn, John Howard, David Livingstone, and others. Tens of thousands have got no farther than this in reading the life of Jesus Christ. They see what their chosen critics see, and say what their critics say. The monumental records of this life are to be misunderstood only for a time. All wrong readings will be corrected presently.

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

"The first care of true Israelites must be the safety of religion.

"He never knew God aright that can abide any competition with his Maker."—[*Bp. Hall.*]

"They that are cut off from public ordinances are likely to lose all religion, and will, by degrees, cease from fearing the Lord.

"Though the form and profession of godliness is kept up by many without the life and power of it, yet the life and power of it will not be long kept up without the form and profession. You take away grace, if you take away the means of grace."—[*Matt. Henry.*]

Verse 30.—THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF A WRONG JUDGMENT OF BRETHREN.

**I. Men getting rid of a strong prejudice.** The tenacity of prejudices. Compare the warmth of the former charges with the statement, "It pleased them."

**II. Men promptly conceding that they had been mistaken.** Phinehas at once owned that the sin had not been committed. The explanation of the two and a half tribes was freely accepted. Phinehas does not seem even to have blamed them for their fault of not conferring with the elders at Shiloh. The conduct of the deputation was generous, manly, and full of true piety.

**III. Men well pleased with the work of their brethren.** So far from retaining any of their former prejudice, they were pleased with the godly ingenuity of the memorial. They quickly mastered the high lesson of looking also "on the things of others."

Verse 31.—THE LORD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE.

**I. The Lord's withdrawal the forerunner of His chastisement.** "Now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord."

**II. The Lord's presence perceived in the fact that His people have been kept from sin.** "Because ye have not committed this trespass."

**III. The Lord's presence recognised with gladness and thanksgiving.** It is not a little significant that this should have been the form of their first expression after the discovery of their mistake.

Verse 33.—ANXIETY GIVING PLACE TO JOY.

**I. The joy of a whole nation.** The people who had gathered at Shiloh, anxiously fearing that they might have to make war on their brethren, suddenly find their anxiety turned into gladness. The heart of the people must have been "as the heart of one man."

**II. The joy of a whole nation in averted judgment.** The people might have feared God's judgments on themselves. It seemed almost certain that judgment must fall on their brethren. The songs of this day must have been far more grateful to the ears of heaven than any pæan of national victory.

**III. The joy of a whole nation in**

**the Lord.** "The children of Israel blessed God." "He who keepeth Israel" had not slumbered. The mercy was regarded as one of heaven's own sending.

**IV. The joy of a whole nation, the outcome of a nation's faith.** As in the words of the penitent thief—"Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom"—there was marvellous faith shown in Christ, so there must have been great faith underlying this national emotion. The people must have believed very fully (1) *in the sin of disobeying God's commands*, (2) *in God's punishment of sin*, (3) *in the presence of God to behold sin*, (4) *in God's discernment of men's hearts, as well as of their acts*, (5) *and, probably, like Phinehas and his brethren, in the Divine keeping of the hearts of men.*

**Verse 34.—THE ALTAR OF WITNESS.** "From the incidents above related we may gather:

1. "That the best meant things may afford cause of suspicion.

2. "It can do our brethren no injury to be jealous over them with a godly jealousy, even when we may be mistaken in our fears.

3. "Nothing will so soon kindle the zeal of a faithful and devoted spirit as the symptoms of apostacy from God in others, because to such nothing is so dear as His glory.

4. "Rising corruptions and dangerous errors should, in the spirit of meekness, be resisted as soon as broached, lest the evil leaven, being permitted to spread, should leaven the whole mass.

5. "The testimony of a good conscience is the most effectual support against the heaviest accusation."—[*Bush.*]

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *JOSHUA'S FIRST FAREWELL ADDRESS.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. A long time after that the Lord had given rest]** Probably the beginning of this period is to be reckoned from the time indicated in chap. xxi. 44, to the similar phrase of which the historian looks back. The "long time," after the second division of the land, appears to have been about sixteen years (cf. on chap. xiii. 1). **2. Called for all Israel and for,** *etc.*] Omit "*and.*" The gathering was a representative one, and the four clauses which follow are meant to stand in explanation of the words "all Israel." Joshua called all Israel, *i.e.*, their elders, their heads, *etc.* **3. Because of you]** *Heb.*, *mipp'nēychem* =*from before you.* It is not said that God slew the Canaanites *because* of the Israelites, but before their "faces," *i.e.*, before the Israelites in battle. The figurative meaning, *on account of*, though frequently admissible, would here obviously alter the sense of the passage. Calvin translates by *in conspectu vestro*, but Tremellius and Junius have *propter vos.* The same form in verse 5 is rendered, *from before you*, with which in both places, agree the LXX. **7. That ye come not among these nations]** They were not to form with the Canaanites any civil or social alliances. The word rendered "come" indicates close and familiar intercourse. **Neither make mention,** *etc.*] "Four different expressions are used to describe idolatry. (1.) *Hiz'kîr v'shēm elohim, to make mention of the name of their gods*, in such a manner that he who mentions them gives himself up to them, approaches them with love, *i.e.*, *to mention them with admiration. Hiz'kîr* does not mean to praise, as is evident from Ex. xxiii. 13; see also Ps. xx. 8 (ver. 7, E.V.), and Hengstenberg's notes on that passage. (2.) *Lo thash'bî'u, not to cause to swear* by the gods of the Canaanites. Swearing and causing to swear by a god were in ordinary life the most frequent evidence of belief in that god, and therefore the law was enforced, that the name of Jehovah was to be the only one by which they swore (Deut. vi. 13, x. 20). (3.) *'Avad, to serve them, colere;* and (4.) *hish'tach'veh, to worship*, are distinguished from each other in this way: the former expresses rather the external worship by sacrifice; the latter, calling upon God from the heart. The two words are frequently connected together. They are so in the original passage, Ex. xx. 5; see also Ex. xxiii. 24; Deut. iv. 19, v. 9, viii. 19, xxx. 17, *etc.*" [*Keil.*] **11. Take good heed therefore unto yourselves]** *Marg.*, "unto your souls." "Take heed with all your soul;" so *Winer* and *Ges.*, quoted by *Keil*, who adds, The form is used "for the sake of emphasis, to denote that inward vigilance which comes from the soul." **12. Make marriages with them]** The same sense is conveyed by the *Heb.* in ver. 7. **13. Snares . . . traps . . scourges . . . thorns]** cf. passages in margin. The threatenings have a kind of cumulative force. The energy of the warnings here is the measure of the pathos in the entreaty of ver. 8—11. **14. Behold, this day]** A similar use of *hayyom*, "this day," occurs in Deut. ix. 1, where the phrase is also employed to denote, not this day actually, but an early day or time.

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—5.

### The Dominating Interest of a Godly Man in his Last Days.

Almost everything about a man gets "old and stricken in age," saving the desires of the godly towards God and godly things. The body decays, let it have been ever so vigorous. Appetites fail, one by one, till the choicest dainties and even necessary food no longer tempt. Beauty wanes and vanishes. The problems which have kept a mind active for half a century presently fail to command more than a passing thought. The love of pleasure and wickedness is no exception to the general rule. The things which once so seductively won and delighted the life that chose to revel in them, sooner or later, not only fail to please, but are found absolutely nauseous. Many other preachers than Solomon, whether publicly or only to themselves, eventually cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." It says something, at least, for the spiritual mind, that as long as other minds can watch it, it shews no sign of decay. When everything else gets stricken with many days, the love of the heart towards God and goodness is strong as ever. Nay, this is the time when it renews its youth. (Cf. Ps. lxxiii. 26.) Infidelity finds its strongest foe in the life most stricken with weakness. The roughest camping ground for unbelief is on the margin of the grave. It is there, more than anywhere else, that faith is unencumbered by doubt. It does us good to see this venerable servant of God so stricken without, and yet so strong within. The ruling desire of the failing veteran was to see idolatry banished, Israel holy and happy, and Jehovah glorified.

**I. Here is an aged man diligently setting himself to complete the work of his life.** Hoping that Israel would feel the appeal that came from one whose life had been given to them in so simple and thorough a manner, Joshua tried to say words that might make his past service an abiding help to his people. 1. *Many useful lives are left to drift down to posterity as best they can.* Our aged men are too prone to retire. Then, what they have done well through many years is apt to retire from the public mind also. A few broken words from an aged man with a great life behind him, are words which no one else can speak. Such a man should try and say them. They are very beautiful from such lips. Power goeth forth from them. Many lives are like nails well driven home, but unclenched. There are aged men just gone from us, and some among us now, whose broken words of weakness compel our faith and fervour as did none of the more eloquent utterances of their younger days. 2. *A life which has been for others all through, can only end nobly as it continues for others to the last.* Joshua did not call the elders to get them to aid him in perpetuating his own fame. Not a word falls from the dear old man which takes the slightest tinge of self-admiration or self-concern. The pain of the bodily effort was all for the people. Love for them and love for God was moving the aged man to this effort. It was not self-love. Joshua does not even impress us with the feeling that he was trying to prepare to die well. All that had been settled long ago. He was working with his last strength to try and get others to live well. A godly life has no room for selfishness even on the borders of the grave. 3. *However nobly a life may continue and end, only one life is complete—the life of Jesus Christ.* Joshua was but the supplement of Moses. The purposes of Moses, like those of Job, were "broken off." He died looking into the land which he failed to reach. And even Joshua had left many Canaanites still unconquered. There remained, still, very much land to be possessed. The best lives are only a segment. We are all only arcs, some longer and some shorter, in the circle of God's plan. Only the life of Jesus represents a completed idea. Probably His were the only lips which ever tried to frame for their dying utterance the august words, "It is finished." Paul said, "I have finished my course," but he had no such fulness of meaning in his mind as He who declared, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." The Lord, who was so separate from sinners in His life, is no less alone in His death. **II. An aged man hiding**

the work of a great life behind the greater work of God. "Ye have seen all that the Lord hath done . . . . for the Lord your God is He that hath fought for you." To the people, Joshua had seemed to have done much. They probably both honoured and loved him. It would have been easy for Joshua to have magnified his own work. Instead of this, and with a beautiful freedom from affectation in his humility, the veteran soldier treats himself as a mere subordinate, and extols God as the real leader of the army. John the Baptist was willing that his own light should wane before the greater brightness of the Rising Sun of Righteousness. Thus, also, Joshua conceals his own fame by bidding the people gaze on the incomparable glory of Jehovah. 1. *To extol God is due to truth.* (*a*) God had wonderfully and visibly interposed in times of Israel's greatest difficulties. The dividing of the Jordan. The fall of the walls of Jericho. The hailstorm at Beth-horon, and the phenomenal staying of the sun and moon. (*b*) God had guided Joshua. The plans of battle had been from the Captain of the Lord's host (chap. v. 13—15, vi. 1—5). (*c*) God had encouraged Joshua in almost every battle where his own heart might have failed him. The gracious "fear not" of Jehovah was continually anticipating Joshua's trembling and depression (chap. iii. 7, 8; vi. 2; viii. 1, 18; x. 8; xi. 6). (*d*) When God had once withdrawn from His servant, then Joshua had been utterly defeated (chap. vii. 1—12). (*e*) God had maintained, every day, Joshua's health and strength. It would have been false to truth if Joshua had exalted himself. Every triumph of ours might be as truly traced to the help of the Lord. 2. *To extol God is due to God.* If His own "right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory," shall a man rob God of the glory due unto His name? Let us rather imitate Joshua here, and sing with the pious Israelite of a later generation about these same triumphs: "In God we boast all the day long" (cf. Psalm xliv. 1—8). 3. *To extol God is due to men.* Those about us should not be drawn from God by our own personal vanity, but rather be led to God by our adoring praise. When the king passes by, he is but a mean citizen who tries to attract attention to himself. 4. *To extol God is due to ourselves.* The man who seeks to appropriate the glory due to Jehovah does but rob himself. He gains nothing, and loses all the joy of fealty and childhood. **III. An aged man reviewing God's goodness in the past, and finding therein an assurance of God's help in difficulties yet to come.** "The Lord your God, He shall expel them from before you," etc. Many years of experience had taught Joshua that he might unquestionably trust in Jehovah. Looking into the future of the Israelites, no doubt troubled his clear faith on that side of things which related to God. Of the people, Joshua had many doubts; of God, none whatever. He was far from assuming that Divine help had been given on his own account. He saw that hitherto Divine help had been given because of Divine love to the nation, and that if the people continued faithful, God would continue to bless them. The aged warrior felt that he was fast going the way of all the earth; he did not therefore think that victory must fail the people. He could no longer lead them to the battle; God would be as able and as willing to cause them to triumph notwithstanding. With such a life of prowess behind him, it is very beautiful that Joshua in no way considered himself essential to victory. The thought of his own absence did not so much as begin to obscure his faith in the sufficiency of God's presence. The triumphs of the Church in our day have all been of the Lord. No individual servant of God is a necessity. True faith dwells altogether above men resting only in God.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verse 1.—The Lord's Gift of Rest.** I. The Lord's gift of rest in spite of great difficulties. The bondage in Egypt; the pursuing Egyptians, and the confronting sea; the swellings of Jordan; the enemies within the land itself: under Divine leading, and before Divine power, all these hindrances were

as nothing So far from preventing the gift of rest, they only exalted it. They became, as it were, the emphasis of the rest. Witness the after songs of peace which these conflicts only served to provoke. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

**II. The Lord's gift of rest, notwithstanding many sins.** Sin in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in Canaan. Sin in the leaders of Israel, as by Moses and Aaron. Sin among the people: prominent sins, as at the return of the spies, as by Korah, Zimri, and Achan; secret and unrecorded sins. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

**III. The Lord's gift of rest unto Israel.** 1. *Rest given to the children of many promises.* See the covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 2. *Rest given to a people whom God sought to make a praise in the earth.* The Lord was preparing them to sing, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." 3. *Rest given to the people of God as a witness against idolatry.* The penalties of sin are to forfeit everything worth keeping, and to inherit only desolation and pain. The reward of serving God is to be made heirs of God. 4. *Rest given to the people of God, but given only in instalments.* All the enemies were not yet subdued; if Israel only kept the faith, they would be. If the people served Jehovah truly on earth, Canaan would be merely the portico to heaven. He who serves the Lord faithfully may always say, "There *remaineth* therefore a rest to the people of God." The children of the King of kings ever have some estate in possession, and much in reversion.

**IV. The Lord's gift of rest to Israel the prediction and beginning of a higher rest to be offered to all the world.** God began to teach the world in one place. Israel was only a concentrated view of mercy which God was ready to offer to all men. Canaan was never intended to be other than God's preface to a Christian world. Local blessing stands here as a preamble to the epistle of God's universal love. Canaan was God's preparation for Calvary, and Israel did but make way for the fulness of the Gentiles. The rest of God was never meant to rest.

Verse 2.—The Providence of a Fatherly Spirit.

"The pious solicitude of Joshua is here set forth, for the imitation of all who are in authority. For as the father of a family will not be considered sufficiently provident if he thinks of his children only till the end of his own life, and does not extend his care farther, studying as much as in him lies to do them good even when he is dead; so good magistrates and rulers ought carefully to provide that the well-arranged condition of affairs, as they leave them, be confirmed and prolonged to a distant period. For this reason Peter writes (2 Pet. i. 25), that he will endeavour after he has departed out of the world to keep the Church in remembrance of his admonitions, and able to derive benefit from them."—[*Calvin.*]

Verse 3.—The Sword of the Lord and of Men.

**I. Men may seem to hold the sword, but it is ever God who fights against the enemies of truth.** The Israelites were simply instruments in the Divine chastisement of idolaters. This is continuously insisted on throughout the book. It is the same in many other instances. The overthrow of Tyre, Nineveh, Jerusalem, and other places, let the instruments vary as they may, is spoken of as God's punishment of transgression. Thus also a godly man of the last generation said of his trials, "My sins are reappearing to me in the form of men."

**II. Men may seem to win prowess, but in all true victories the battle is the Lord's.** 1. *The Lord is He who really fights.* "The Lord your God is He that hath fought." 2. *The Lord's fighting is for His people.* "He hath fought for you." 3. *The Lord's fighting is for the truth, that through it many may become His people indeed.*

**III. Men may seek praise for themselves, or give glory to the Lord, but only he who honours God is really exalted.** Joshua has come to far more exaltation through his humility than

could ever have been possible through a foolish vanity. It is ever thus. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." If that is God's word, it is also man's resolute dogma. Many men are weak enough to be vain; no man will tolerate foolish conceit outside of his own heart. This history shews us that: 1. *Temptations to self-glorying are numerous.* 2. *Inducements to praise God are more numerous.* 3. *To give glory sincerely to the Lord is to receive lasting honour from men.*

Verses 3—5.—THE LORD'S WORK AND MAN'S WORK.

I. **The Lord's work affording a glorious retrospect.** What has been done, He has done. "Ye have seen all," *etc.* (ver. 3).

II. **The Lord's work the foundation of all that seems done by men.** "I have not fought, *but He.*" "I have divided unto you, but I have done even that *by the guidance of the Lord's lot.*" God had been both power and light.

III. **The Lord's work the only hope for the future.** 1. *In the casting out of enemies.* "He shall expel them." 2. *In the possession of an undisturbed inheritance.* "As the Lord your God hath promised you."

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6—10.*

FROM COURAGE, THROUGH HOLINESS, TO VICTORY.

Joshua, who had so often personally led the Israelites to victory, here shews them how they may attain like triumphs after he is gone. The aged general, who is about to go the way of all the earth, tells out the secret of his many triumphs ere he departs. This secret of victory holds good on every field where men can be found fighting for truth and for God.

Taking Joshua's words in the order given, the leading thoughts which they contain may be thus stated:

I. **There can be no holiness without courage.** "Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written." Unless they were courageous they would fail both in keeping and in doing. Nor would an ordinary courage suffice; they must be *very* courageous. 1. *Men need to be very courageous to constantly resist temptation.* A little courage will do to keep *some* of the things that are written. Ordinary fortitude will do for easy occasions. There are multitudes who can keep ever so many things on Sunday, when in God's house, and among God's people; and yet, at other times, they utterly fail. 2. *Men need to be very courageous to steadily confess their love to God.* Some people treat confession as a thing to be attended to once in a lifetime. They confess their love to Christ when they join His Church, and then they seem to suppose that they have done with this matter of confession altogether. Some think confession a matter for the grand occasions of life. They admire the firmness which led Daniel to the lions' den, and readily applaud the fidelity of the three Hebrews on the plain of Dura. They believe thoroughly in the heroism recorded in the history of the martyrs. And yet these same admirers of the martyrs fail to be faithful in the small matters of their own daily temptations. We are not to think such men hypocritical and dishonest. Probably many of them would have had courage enough for martyrdom themselves. The simple truth is this: for many temperaments, it needs a better courage to acknowledge Christ daily, than to die for Christ in martyrdom. 3. *Men need to be very courageous to do the things of God with an even and a holy mind.* Many persons are spasmodic in their zeal. At times they have all the boldness of Peter before the Sanhedrim; at other times they are as weak as Peter before the servants of the high priest. What God asks of us is a boldness which is calm enough to ignore parade and to forget shame. 4. *Did men but see things as they are, it would need far more courage to sin than to be holy.* These words do but address themselves to the common feeling of men. It is the transgressor who

most needs to be very courageous. Holiness is man's act of sheltering himself behind an arm which can never fail; sin is man's act of fleeing before the scoff of his weak fellow to defy the Omnipotent. **II. There can be no cleaving to God without holiness.** "Turn not aside . . . . come not among these nations . . . . but cleave unto the Lord your God." A man cannot turn aside and at the same time cleave to God. No man can commune with his idols and also with Jehovah. It is said of some that "they *feared* the Lord and served their own gods;" that is possible, but it is not possible for any one to *cleave* to the Lord and serve his own gods. There is all the difference in the world between that "fearing" and this "cleaving." 1. *Every man may cleave to God.* These are words addressed to all Israel. There was no man in the host who might not have this high honour and this perpetual joy. It is very marvellous to read in the Gospels of the Son of God, "And He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town." What a picture is that! It is omnipotence leading infirmity! It is perfect purity conducting embodied sin! It is God in His veiled glory, hand in hand with man in his manifest wretchedness! That is no exceptional representation of Divine condescension. Here are words which are addressed to a nation, and through that nation to a world in all its succeeding generations, and these words put before us all the possibility of this exalted union. They say to every man, You too may cleave unto the Lord your God. 2. *No man can cleave unto God and also unto sin.* When Jesus leads the blind, it is that they may be blind no longer. When God bids us cleave unto Himself, it is that we may let go all things which are not according to His will. 3. *He who would cleave unto God well, should think much on God's abundant mercy and help* (ver. 9). The faithful man always has a faithful God. Joshua was able to commend the people in their past relation to God (ver. 8); that being so, it followed, as a matter of course, that he could speak with joy of God's past relation to His people. He who has endeavoured faithfully to do his little things for God will never want occasion to sing, "The Lord hath done great things for me, whereof I am glad." And then, God's gracious past helps the faithful man's future. "Because Thou hast been my help, therefore under the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." A holy life ever becomes full of encouragements to holiness. It is sin that makes such facilities for sinning. The iniquity of a man's heels "compasses him about;" the piety of a man compasses him about no less. **III. There can be no victory without cleaving to God.** "One man of you shall chase a thousand; for the Lord your God, He it is that fighteth for you, as He hath promised you." The help of God is for the man who cleaves to God. Without God, no man can prevail. His very victories become defeats. No matter how few or weak the foes, or what may be the field, he who fights without God must fail. With God one man may chase a thousand. Elisha led the army of the king of Syria whithersoever he would (2 Kings vi. 8—23). Peter, with God's angel to help, was more than the four quaternions of soldiers who sought to keep him. Paul and Silas, with their feet made fast in the stocks, sang till their bondage melted into liberty, and they presently found their oppressors turned into suppliants. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 6.—Man's Relation to that which is Written.

**I. Every man should be acquainted with that which is written.** The Bible claims the attention of every living man who has heard of it. Any man who wilfully neglects to make himself acquainted with it is entitled to small respect from his fellow-men. 1. *The Scriptures are the greatest moral and social force that the world has ever known.* 2. *The influence of the Scriptures, while so mighty, has ever been for good.* 3. *The intrinsic character of the Scriptures is another claim on our attention which should not be resisted.* For these and other reasons of a similar character, **every one should at least**

acquaint himself thoroughly with the Bible. Some of the most notorious infidels of the last generation acknowledge that they had hardly read the Bible at all. A man's self-respect has its claims, and this acquaintance with the Scriptures is a very important claim, even in this direction.

II. No man should act partially with that which is written. Men stand in an important relation to *all* that is written in the book. Many people deal with the Bible as they would with the multiplied dishes of a sumptuous dinner; they choose what they prefer, and leave the rest. They think themselves under no kind of obligation to take aught but what is agreeable. 1. *Men choose promises, and leave the precepts.* 2. *Men choose among the precepts themselves.* 3. *Men choose as to the traits of the revealed character of God.* 4. *Men choose among Scripture doctrines.* The Bible stands or falls as a whole. No man can pick and choose among the laws of his country. No man has liberty to leave some laws unkept, and to say: "I make an exception in the matter of theft, in the matter of impurity, or on the question of murder." A man must be either a citizen or an outlaw. Law is binding all round. He who looks for law to keep himself and his family is a debtor to do the whole law of his country. So the things written in the book of the law of God are all obligatory. Heaven is very merciful to pardon sin, but not to permit determinate rebellion in anything. Heaven also says: "You must be outlaw or citizen."

III. All men need courage before that which is written. 1. *It needs courage to keep that which is written.* Courage before scoffers. Courage as to conventional proprieties and customs. Courage under disappointments. 2. *It needs courage to do that which is written.* Courage to be faithful in times of great importance. Courage to be faithful in that which is least. 3. *It needs courage to keep straight on.* We are to turn neither to the right hand nor to the left. The things which are written ask for progress. They ask, also, for undeviating progress. 4. *It needs most courage of all to reject that which is written.* Men are only able to reject what is written by ceasing to think on the things with which the writings deal. Few people would be able to sin much and at the same time think carefully. A man who turns from God has need to make himself both blind and deaf to some things.

Verse 7.—FELLOWSHIP WITH THE UNGODLY.

"Have no civil or social contracts with them (*see* ver. 12), as these will infallibly lead to *spiritual* affinities, in consequence of which ye will make honourable *mention of the name of their gods, swear by them* as the judges of your motives and actions, *serve them* in their abominable rites, *and bow yourselves unto them* as your creators and preservers; thus giving the whole worship of God to idols: and all this will follow from simply *coming among them.* He who *walks* in the counsel of the *ungodly* will soon *stand* in the way of *sinners*, and shortly *sit* in the seat of the *scornful.* 'No man rises to the highest stages of iniquity but by *degrees.*' Nero himself, under the instructions of Seneca was a promising youth."—[*A. Clarke, LL.D.*]

"Bad men will be as the heathen were for the Israelites, a trap and a snare, and a scourge in the sides, and thorns in the eyes for those who live in intercourse with them."—[*Fay.*]

Verses 8—10.—REASONS FOR CLEAVING UNTO GOD.

I. Cleave unto God because you have long done so already (ver. 8). 1. *The obligation arising from known liberty and possibility.* All the past says that you may so cleave. The past says that you can cleave to God. It is no speculation. There is no excuse on the side of fear as to acceptance. There is no excuse in the direction of insufficient strength. 2. *The obligation of continued necessity.* All the old reasons for cleaving to Him are still in force. New reasons have been continually added. 3. *The obligation of consistency.* No man should lightly make his life into a series of grave

contradictions. 4. *The obligation of not hindering others.* The past days of cleaving to God may have led others to God. Turning back would hinder them.

II. Cleave unto God because you have not cleaved to Him in vain (ver. 9). 1. *God has given His help irrespective of personal merit.* "The Lord hath driven out from before *you*." You who sinned so often in the wilderness. You who had an Achan among you. You who have been so slow to go up and possess the land. 2. *God has helped notwithstanding mighty enemies.* He hath driven out from before you "great nations and strong." 3. *God's help has never yet failed you.* "No man hath been able to stand before you unto this day."

III. Cleave unto God because you will yet need God. 1. *A man's enemies may yet be against him as a thousand to one.* No man can predict his future. No man knows the relation of others to him in the future. 2. *God's help is equal to any emergencies.* If necessary, cleaving to Him, "one man shall chase a thousand." We do not know the future; let it be enough that we know the power and love of God. 3. *God's help is promised.* There is no question about the sufficiency of that help; neither is there any question about its being given to the man who cleaves unto the Lord. History guarantees the sufficiency of Divine power; the everlasting covenant, added to history, pledges the constancy of Divine love.

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 11—16.

### Forces of Preservation and Destruction.

Life, look upon it in what sphere we may, seems to have conflict for its inevitable condition. Sometimes life in one form preys upon life in another form. Everywhere, life has some foes that wait around it to work it harm—some influences by which it is ever being drawn unto death. There are also sustaining and restoring forces which are placed around life in every sphere. These verses present us with a picture of human life as it stands in contact with things that tend both to its preservation and destruction. Socially, nationally, and spiritually, human life is here shewn in possible contact with things which help it, and with things which destroy it.

I. The restraining power of love to God (ver. 11). Love to God keeps men from "going back" to the influences which work death. The way of love to God is the way of life in God. 1. *Love to God places a man higher in life than any other influence.* He who lives in the love of God, lives far above all his fellows who want this love, let them dwell where they may. Love to God leads a man into a healthy region where life is ever strong, and where it takes on its noblest forms. The ideal of the ancient Romans was power. To them, to be mighty was to live. The ideal of the Greeks was beauty and wisdom. The Greek thought he lived most nobly when he dwelt amidst the most beautiful things which art could devise, and there talked philosophy. The modern English ideal seems to be riches. "Give me wealth," says the Englishman; "it has a vast purchasing power over almost everything: to be rich is to live indeed." The Bible ideal of life is love. Power may be pleasant, wisdom and beauty may be fascinating, and riches may help the soul, even within a few hours of death, to say, "Take thine ease; thou hast much goods laid up for many years;" yet life is not in these. A greater than these is love. 2. *Love to God is life in a positive form, while mere obedience to God is hardly more than keeping from things which work death.* Obedience submits to the voice which cries, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me;" Love responds, "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth!" Before the proclamation, "Thou shalt not make unto

thee any graven image," Obedience just refrains from sculpture; but Love rejoins, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Obedience declines to take the name of the Lord God in vain; Love exclaims, "The desire of our soul is to Thy name;" "There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we may be saved." Obedience refuses to break the Sabbath; Love says, "I call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord, honourable." Thus it is with the whole of the law. Love is the very soul of the commandments: it is the life thereof. Kept in the letter, they are mere tables of stone—cold, frigid, and unseemly; kept in love, they are a living power, filled with the beauty of the love which animates them. 3. *Love to God leads to God who is the source of life.* Love of country, even in the traveller, presently turns his steps towards his native land. Love of father and mother quickens the steps of the schoolboy on his way towards home. The man who loves God will seek to come to God. 4. *Love to God makes him who loves like God.* The man who loves letters gets presently a literary look. The farmer gets an agricultural appearance. Family likeness may be sometimes partly owing to family love. So they who gaze admiringly on God are "changed into His image." When inspired Jude would have his brethren be found separate from evil-doers, he said, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." So when Joshua would restrain his people from fellowship with idolaters, he says, similarly, "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God." **II. The destroying power of corrupt society** (ver. 12, 13). If the Israelites entered into close intercourse with the wicked, the wicked would vex them with many forms of pain, and ultimately cause them to perish from off the good land which the Lord their God had given them. 1. *Corrupt society is insidious in its attractions.* It has "snares and traps." True, it has also "scourges" for the sides, and "thorns" for the eyes; but as the significant order of the text, so is the ingenious cruelty of the process: the snares and traps are placed first, and not till the victim is secure come the scourges and the thorns. Corrupt men lead the pure away stealthily; they instinctively conceal their worst things, reveal their best, and thus draw their prey onward. The very virtues of the pure sometimes help in the work of destruction. "Charity thinketh no evil," and the innocent man is tempted to say of his seducers, "These men have been unfairly spoken of; they are better than report stated." Time, too, is on the side of decay. 2. *Corrupt society has, for many, a fascinating influence.* It plies them in their weakest places. It consults their peculiar appetites. In its various and bountiful cruelty it holds the cup of water to the thirsty, gives bread to the hungry, has wine for the intemperate, and a feast of fat things for the glutton. With its thousand influences of seductive battery it plies hard every gate of the senses. 3. *Corrupt society is hard to escape from.* Its "snares" draw very closely into fast knots, and its "traps" lock upon their prey as the jaws spring together. 4. *Corrupt society works corruption, and death through corruption.* In some forms of disease, the body seems mercifully to die first, and afterwards to decay. In other diseases corruption is a part of the process of dying. The latter is ever the dreadful form in which the soul goes down to its grave. Woful indeed is the cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Happy is he who can add, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Sometimes, even amid the wretchedness of this spiritual decay, a man flatters himself that he is still vigorous and healthy. The secret of the mistake may be found in the appropriately loathsome image of Burke, "Corruption breeds new forms of life." There is in every realm of creation a life that worketh death, and such too is the life in which the corrupt mind finds enough to satisfy it that it is "not dead yet." **III. The stimulating power of grateful recollections** (ver. 14). 1. *The Israelites were to remember the good example of a faithful man.* Joshua had led them in patience, and wisdom, and courage, and holiness. He was now going the way of all the earth; but he, being dead, might yet be found speaking helpfully. 2. *They*

*were to remember that God had fulfilled every good word of His promises.* Not one promise had failed. They knew that in their own souls; they might know it also in their many possessions. God ever encourages His people by the faithfulness of some of their fellows, and always by His own faithfulness. **IV. The fatal power of Divine anger** (ver. 16). Before that, said Joshua, "Ye shall perish quickly." As the beauty of God's love, so is the terribleness of God's anger. 1. *The anger of God in no way reflects upon His holiness.* All government supposes the punishment of evil-doers. Divine anger is not an impulsive passion, but the calm exercise of justice upon transgressors for the sake of all men. 2. *The anger of God is not inconsistent with His mercy.* There are instances in which righteousness demands anger. Thus it is said that "one of the late Dr. Spencer's parishioners in Brooklyn met him hurriedly urging his way down the street one day; his lip was set, and there was something strange in that gray eye. 'How are you to-day, doctor?' asked the parishioner, pleasantly. He waked as from a dream, and replied soberly, 'I am mad!' It was a new word for a mild, true-hearted Christian; but he waited, and with a deep earnest voice went on, 'I found a widow standing by her goods which were thrown into the street; she could not pay the month's rent; the landlord turned her out; and one of her children is going to die; and that man is a member of the Church. I told her to take her things back again. I am on my way to see him.'" So mercy and anger dwelt together in the heart of Him who drove the traders out of the temple with a scourge of small cords, and wept over the city in its guilt and coming doom. 3. *The anger of God is necessary to His mercy.* If the anger could not be righteous, the mercy could not be real. If God's anger towards the wicked were not right, He would be bound to pardon everybody. When pardon is compulsory, it is no longer mercy. If the idea of mercy is true, the possibility of anger must be true also. Mercy is a beautiful flower growing up from the very soil of righteous anger, and you cannot take away the ground in which the flower grows without removing the flower too. Mercy is a glorious picture, painted by the love of Christ upon the groundwork of justice in the punishment of sin, and he who destroys the canvas must not murmur when he finds that the picture has vanished. 4. *The anger of God is real, and terrible in its results.* When it is kindled against men, they quickly perish from off the good land where mercy loved to see them dwell. That is always the spirit of the Scripture representation.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verse 11.—A Man's Command of his own Heart.**

Some persons regard love as entirely spontaneous. Admitting that a wrong affection may be held in check, they assume also that love cannot be created, and that it is free from the control of the will. If that were true, while it might be sinful to love wrong objects, it would no longer be sinful to fail to love right objects. This is not the teaching of the Bible: that not only says, 'Love not the world;' it also bids us love God with all our hearts, love one another, and further says to us, 'Set your affections on things above.' Any metaphysical difficulty in obeying these commands will ever disappear before practical and earnest piety. He who guards himself from all love that is wrong, will find little difficulty in obeying the Scripture admonition to love that which is right. This verse suggests the following considerations:—

**I. Men are commanded to watch their affections.** 'Take good heed,' etc.

**II. Men are commanded to control their affections.** They are to set them on right objects.

**III. Men are commanded to set their affections upon God.** 'Love the Lord your God.' These commands are given in view of the fact that God ever helps the man who sincerely seeks the way of righteousness.

**Verses 12, 13.—The Power of Evil Associations.**

Every healthy mind seeks other minds with which it can have fellowship. It is only the morbid disposition that cries often for 'a lodge in some vast wilderness.' Companions are a necessity. God's word recognises the necessity, but bids us choose our associates carefully.

I. **Wicked companions make a man satisfied with a heart of unbelief.** It would be very difficult for any Israelite to worship idols, if every one around him worshipped God. It would be very hard work for any wicked man to continue an unbeliever in Jesus Christ now, if he were the only unbeliever. A man should sometimes ask himself, "How should I feel if I were the only unbeliever in my family?—in my town or parish?—in England?—in the world?" Robinson Crusoe's lot provokes pity. This spiritual isolation would be far more pitiable, and far more unendurable. There are probably few, even of the boldest infidels, who could bear to be the only infidel in the world. Yet it is not difficult to think of a man as able to endure the thought of cleaving to Christ with a holy joy, even though every one else rejected Christ. Every unbelieving man is responsible for the countenance which his example is giving to others. The fellowship of holy men is a great power for good; the fellowship of the wicked is no less a power for evil.

II. **Wicked companions make others partakers of their wickedness.** Idolatrous Canaanites would make idolatrous Israelites. 1. *There is the law of assimilation.* Where life is the stronger force, it builds itself up into yet more strength by feeding on surrounding matter, and by making that a part of itself. But often disease and decay overcome life, and assimilate it to their condition. Infection and contagion are parts of the process of assimilation. So a man becomes like his companions, the weaker man succumbing to the stronger. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." A man may say, "I do not believe that it will be so in my case." But his belief does not matter; the operation of the law is no more affected by the man's opinion of the law, than yeast is affected by a man's faith or unbelief in its power to leaven the whole lump into which it is put. This law works on silently and slowly, but surely; and, like other laws, it takes small heed of a man's opinion about its power. With fools, means like fools, whether a man believes it or not. With idolaters, means idolatry. 2. *There is also to be taken into account the habit of imitation.* Men everywhere practise it unconsciously. More than this; such imitators usually copy the worst features most strongly. "Paint me as I am, blotches and all," said Oliver Cromwell to his artist. Thus, in unconscious imitation, men continually reproduce others, and, so far from omitting the blotches, they usually magnify them in the process. 3. *The influence of food should not be forgotten in its bearing upon this subject.* In a measure, a man's physical nature is made by what he eats and drinks. Companions are the food of a man's social nature, and, to some extent, here also, as the food so the man. In his book on "The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Mankind," Sir John Lubbock gives several curious illustrations of the ludicrous beliefs which the natives of some countries have in respect to food. "The Malays at Singapore give a large price for the flesh of a tiger, not because they like it, but because they believe that the man who eats tiger acquires the sagacity as well as the courage of that animal." Thus, too, the Dyaks of Borneo are said to shun the flesh of the deer, lest they should become timid; the Caribs reject the flesh of pigs and tortoises, that they may not have small eyes; and the Arabs ascribe the passionate and revengeful character of their countrymen to the use of camel's flesh. It is further said that "the New Zealanders, after baptizing an infant, used to make it swallow pebbles, so that its heart might be hard and incapable of pity." All this proceeds on the assumption that a man's physical food affects his moral qualities, which, while true in some aspects, is absurd in the manner stated. A man's moral food,

however, will certainly affect his moral nature. He who socially feeds on idolatry will become an idolater. He who walks in the counsels of the ungodly will presently occupy the seat of the scorner, as one belonging to himself. 4. *All history confirms the truth of these observations.* Different nations are marked by distinct traits of character. The names of Greece and Rome represent literature. Turks are known as idle and cruel, Russians as ambitious and cruel, the Spanish as proud, the French as polite, and the Scotch as patriotic. One man in a nation has influenced another, some features have become predominant, and thus a distinctive character has been given to the world's separated tribes and peoples. Thus, too, there have been distinctive ages: an age of painting, an age of letters, an age of religious persecution, and ages when these things were out of fashion, and something else was more popular. It is worth while, also, to note how many Calvinists have Calvinistic children, and how many Arminians find their offspring holding Arminian views. The children of Episcopalians attach themselves, for the most part, to the Church of their fathers; while in the families of Wesleyans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and the like, the sect also descends from the father to the child. Creeds are hereditary, not so much because of the character of the creed, but because a man becomes like those who are about him to form his character. With so much history to teach him, no man can afford to neglect the warning given in these verses. He who would not become an idolater must shun idolaters.

III. **Wicked companions destroy all that remains of a man's better feelings and desires.** 1. *Good things are neglected, and neglect works death.* A limb unused would soon become useless. An unexercised faculty dies out. So it is in a man's soul: "From him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath." 2. *Men get used to evil things, and the evil things destroy the good.* It is said that a prisoner who had been confined for many years in the Bastile, when liberated, cried like a child to be taken back again to the old solitude and darkness with which he had become familiar. Men may get used to strange things. The idolater presently finds his idolatry far more agreeable than the worship of God. A man may get used to no prayer, no Bible, no story of the cross, and no Saviour. It is terrible to think that it is possible to be "without hope and without God in the world," and to be so reconciled to that dreadful condition as to wish for no alteration.

Verse 14*a*.—The Way of all the Earth.

I. **Death in its certainty.** This is a universal way. The exceptions of Enoch and Elijah do but lay emphasis on the rule.

II. **Death in its variety.** Death has many ministers and forms. It is met in various moods. It has vastly different issues.

III. **Death in its conscious nearness.** "This day I am going," *etc.* That is to say, "I am going soon: I feel it." The hour of departure is often known to be at hand.

Verse 14*b*.—The Unfailing Words of the Lord.

I. **The words of the Lord are good words.** "All the good things which the Lord your God spake."

II. **The words of the Lord are wrought out gradually.** The war itself had taken several years. Many years had elapsed since the first promises were made to Abraham.

III. **The words of the Lord are every one fulfilled.** "Not one thing hath failed of all the good things."

IV. **The words of the Lord are fulfilled to the satisfying of the heart and soul.** "Ye know in all your hearts," *etc.* It is much to satisfy a man's mind, and to prevent all occasion of actual complaint. It is far more to satisfy the heart. The heart in its sanguine hopefulness ever puts large meanings to words of promise. God meets our highest hopes. He not only silences objections; "He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness."

Verse 15.—GOD'S FULFILMENT OF HIS PROMISES A GUARANTEE OF HIS FULFILMENT OF HIS THREATENINGS.

I. The certainty of Divine promises is to be taken as an assurance of the certainty of Divine threatenings. The argument is: "As all good things, so all evil things." 1. *Fidelity to words sometimes fails from want of power to fulfil words.* Men promise to-day, and to-morrow their power to discharge their promise is taken from them by unforeseen circumstances. Men threaten, it may be quite righteously, but become unable to fulfil their threat. This cannot be so with God. 2. *Fidelity to words sometimes fails because of short-sightedness in the use of words.* Men use words of which they do not see all the meanings. This can never be so with God. 3. *Fidelity to words sometimes fails from a conscientious change of mind.* What Saul might have promised the high priest when he desired of him letters to Damascus, he might have felt it wicked to fulfil after that eventful journey had been taken. God can never change His mind about the righteousness of either His threats or His promises. 4. *Absolute fidelity to words is irrespective of the nature of the words.* Man's weakness, or short-sightedness, or his changed views, might afford him some excuse for not keeping his words; but, for all that, an unkept word is a broken word. It is no part of the question of fidelity that words be about "good things" or "evil things"—that they be promises or threatenings. Hence this same argument is sometimes used in an inverted form (cf. Jer. xxxi. 28, xxxii. 42). God may choose to pardon, if He will, just as any father might withdraw his word and forgive an offending child; but, as a rule, it is here asserted that as God is true to His promises of good things, so He is true in His promises of evil things.

II. The bearing of this truth on our religious faith and life. 1. *No present prosperity should be taken as an essential earnest of permanent prosperity.* God tries men with His good things to see how they will use them. If they are abused, He will take them away. The riches of Dives here, can give no security against the poverty of Dives hereafter. Purple and fine linen may be only for a time. Sumptuous fare to-day is no pledge that there may not be agony for a drop of water presently. 2. *The dark side of the Bible is as true as the bright side.* The faith of many people has in it real promises and empty threatenings, a real heaven and a fabulous hell, real redeemed and scarecrow lost, real angels and more than spectral fiends, a real Christ and a mythical devil. God Himself is held to be real on the side of mercy and gentleness and love, and unreal on the side of every sterner quality. If all this be so indeed, the half of the Bible that is untrue renders the half that is true too poor for either respect or hope. 3. *Every fulfilled promise of God should become to us a warning.* The good things in which He has faithfully kept His word should preach to us of the evil things in which He will also be true. These are very gentle lips which thus solemnly proclaim "wrath to come" against the ungodly. The very tenderness of the tones ought to have, to every unbelieving man, the solemn emphasis of truth. When a mother threatens a child *sotto voce*, while tears of love stream down her face, it is time for the child to repent. So when God sets mercy to preach wrath, and bids His "good things" assure the wicked of His "evil things," it is time to believe indeed. 4. *The measure of man's hope should become, also, the measure of his fear.* There are many who are not Christians who admire the faith and enthusiasm of the Church. The hymns of the Church are not seldom the admiration of many who make no claim whatever of belonging unto Christ. All the joy in which men legitimately hope for heaven as the home of the righteous is preaching the certainty of the sorrow which awaits the ungodly.

Verses 14—16.—CHILDHOOD THROUGH FATHERHOOD.

God was seeking to make the Israelites into a nation which should be separate from all the nations of the earth. He would fashion these children of Abraham into children of God. Mark the process.

God assumes that His people will be faithful. He does not prove them before He blesses them. He treats them as a peculiar people already, in order to make them peculiar. He foresees their coming unfaithfulness, but He does not, even on that account, withhold His good gifts. He still gives the good land, with all its accompanying mercies, and does but warn His people that the gifts are conditional. In view of this spirit, the following thoughts may be expanded and illustrated:

**I. God proposes to make men His children by treating them as His children.**

**II. God the Father gives to men abundantly in the present, that He may prepare them to enjoy the still more abundant mercy of the future.**

**III. To repudiate God's fatherhood, and to ignore the purpose of His fatherly gifts, is to be cut off from the joys of childhood altogether.**

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *JOSHUA'S FINAL ADDRESS: HIS DEATH AND BURIAL.*

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. To Shechem] This gathering was apparently held a few weeks or months after that named in the previous chapter. There was great appropriateness in the selection of Shechem. Here the covenant was first given to Abram (Gen. xii. 6, 7); in the immediate neighbourhood Jacob seems to have renewed it (Gen. xxxiii. 19, 20), and under an oak at Shechem he had "put away the strange gods" of his family (Gen. xxxv. 2—4), as Joshua now reminded the Israelites (ver. 23); here, also, the covenant had been renewed after the fall of Ai (chap. viii. 30—35). No place could be more fit than Shechem for Joshua's parting words, in which the covenant was once more solemnly established with the people. All the tribes] The assembly named in chap. xxiii. was one of the elders only; this was a gathering once more to Ebal of all the men of Israel. They presented themselves before God] "It is possible, as some have supposed, that the tabernacle and the ark were brought hither from Shiloh on this occasion; but the phrase 'before God' (lit. '*before Elohim*') does not necessarily imply this; nor does even the phrase 'before the Lord' (lit. '*before Jehovah*') always do so (cf., *e.g.*, Judges xi. 11), though used sometimes with reference to the tabernacle, as in Joshua xviii. 6." [*Speaker's Com.*] 2. On the other side of the flood] "*Nâhâr*," here used with the article, would be better rendered "*the river*," a term specially applied to the Euphrates, which is indicated. Dean Stanley points out that "the words so often occurring in Ezra, 'beyond the river,' and 'on this side the river,' *though without the article*, refer to the Euphrates." They served other gods] It is not said whether or not Abram joined in this idolatry. Some think these *elohim* of Terah and Nahor to have been the same as the *teraphim* of Laban named in Gen. xxxi. 19, 34. 11. The men of Jericho] "The phrase *bá'âlay y'rîcho* is noteworthy. It means, apparently, the owners or burghers of Jericho (cf. Judges ix. 6; 2 Sam. xxi. 12)." [*Speaker's Com.*] 12. And I sent the hornet before you] This is evidently a figurative expression for *terror* or *fear*. The meaning seems to be identical with that in Ex. xxiii. 27: "I will send my fear before thee," a similar reference to hornets following in the succeeding verse in that place. The same association of the hornet and the terror of God is found in Deut. vii. 20, 21. 14. Now therefore fear the Lord] "The marvellous history so clearly and succinctly recounted was the natural preface for the exhortation which here begins." [*Crosby.*] Put away the gods which your fathers served] That is, Put away all gods made by men. Probably Joshua did not allude to *exactly* the same kind of gods as those worshipped by Terah, as Crosby suggests, who thinks that the Israelites may have kept some of the actual teraphim, named in Gen. xxxi. 34, as heirlooms among their families. His other suggestion, that some of the idols of the subdued Canaanites had been preserved as curiosities, and were in danger of being presently regarded with reverence, is far more natural and likely. We cannot actually decide whether Joshua alluded to gods cherished "in heart," or to images preserved in the tents of the people. It should not, however, be forgotten that even in the wilderness the Israelites are said to have shown manifest tendencies to idolatry (cf. Ex. xxxii.; Amos v. 25, 26; Acts vii. 39—43), as numbers of them had previously done in Egypt (Ezek. xx. 6—24). 19. Ye cannot serve Jehovah] Joshua here bids the people count the cost of the decision expressed in verse 16. They could not serve Jehovah in the indifferent spirit of idolatry; for He was altogether unlike the gods which were no gods, and which therefore could not punish faithlessness. Jehovah was both holy and jealous, and Joshua would have the people weigh carefully their words of fealty. The idol gods which were no gods might be served godlessly, but Jehovah God must be worshipped with the whole heart by all who professed to be His servants. 21. Nay, but we will serve Jehovah] This second answer of the people shows that they understood Joshua's words in the sense of the foregoing remarks. Though it was so difficult and so fearful a thing to follow Jehovah, yet Him only would they serve, a determination which is once more expressed in the verse that follows.

22. **Put away the strange gods**] Cf. on verse 14. The reiteration here seems to favour the idea that some of the people had idols actually in their possession. 25. **Joshua made a covenant**] Lit., "*cut a covenant*," from *Kārath*, "*to cut*," "*to cut off*." "*Kārath b'rîth, to make a covenant*, so used from slaying and dividing the victims, as was customary in making a covenant (cf. Gen. xv. 18; Jer. xxxiv. 8, 18)." [*Gesen.*] 26. **Under an oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.** *Heb.*, "*under* THE *oak which was* IN *the sanctuary of Jehovah*," alluding, not to the tabernacle, but to the holy place of history which God had consecrated by appearing there to Abram (Gen. xii. 6), and which Jacob had further made sacred by putting away the strange gods of his household (Gen. xxxv. 4), including, most likely, the teraphim of Laban stolen by Rachel. 27. **It hath heard all the words**] "Compare, for this bold figure, Hab. ii. 11, and our Saviour's own words, Luke xix. 40." [*Crosby.*] 30. **Timnath-serah**] For the site of this place, see note on chap. xix. 50. 32. **The bones of Joseph, *etc.***] "It does not follow from the position of this statement at the end of the book, that the bones were not buried till after the death of Joshua." [*Keil.*] The statement, however, is inserted to show that the oath which their fathers had given to Joseph had not been forgotten or neglected by the Israelites. Moses, in his turn, had been mindful of the trust (Ex. xiii. 19). 33. **A hill that pertained to Phinehas**] *Heb.*="*the hill of Phinehas*," or "*Gibeah of Phinehas*," in the same manner as we afterwards hear of "Gibeah of Saul." The word Gibeah is in the construct state. If a proper name, which seems unlikely, it should be read "Gibeath-Phinehas."

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 1—18.

### Reviewing the Past.

"This chapter brings before us another representative assembly—at Shechem this time, and not at Shiloh—in which Joshua renews the covenant between the people and God, as he had done nearly thirty years before in the same place (chap. viii. 30—35). The former address of Joshua seems to have been delivered in the belief that he was soon to leave this world, and was prompted by his ardent desire for the purity of the people, who would, he knew, be sorely tempted away from God by the idolatrous population among them. *This* address, however, and the assembly at which it was delivered, were appointed by Divine direction, as we see by the phrase 'before God,' in ver. 1, and by the formula, 'Thus saith Jehovah, God of Israel,' in ver. 2. The former occasion was, so to speak, a private conference of Joshua with Israel. This occasion was an official conference, in which Joshua acted as the Divine legate."—[*Crosby.*]

In the opening paragraph of this chapter we see the following things:—**I. Men called to remember their lowly origin.** The forefathers of these Israelites were idolaters (ver. 3). Joshua bade them remember that. He bade them remember it by the word of the Lord. The people had been exterminating idolaters. They had entered into the inheritance of idolaters. Yet, but for the grace of God, these Israelites had been idolaters also. Terah was an idolater, and perhaps Abraham also. In effect, Joshua says to these Israelites, as Isaiah seven centuries later said to their children, "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." 1. *A great people should remember that they were not always great.* Somewhere in the distance backward, things were very lowly with every nation, and with every family. 2. *A religious people should remember that they were not always religious.* A religious nation should remember it collectively. The men of such a nation should remember it individually. Paul drew a dreadful picture of men who could not inherit the kingdom of God, and then said to the Corinthians, "And such were some of you." 3. *A great or a religious man should be humble in view of his origin.* The "bar-sinister" on the escutcheon should also be taken into the account. Water will not rise beyond the level of its source. In outward things, men may rise far above their origin; but a wise man will say to his spirit, "There are possibilities of weakness and sin in my nature as bad as that worst place back there in the past; and let my circumstances rise as they may, my pride shall rise no higher than the poor low level of my own or my fathers' shame. What has been may be again." **II. Men told to consider God's more quiet providences.** 1. *In raising*

*up the chief of their national predecessors.* Israel had been blessed by God with men of power (ver. 4, 5). Humanly, they were what they were through their leaders. God had given them an ancestor in Abraham to shew the power of obedience and faith. God had given them "a plain man" of meditative mood, and had shewn in Isaac that even such a mind, if pious, might occupy a conspicuous place in a nation's history. God had given to them Jacob, a man of great industry and power to accumulate wealth; and then, as the getting of the wealth had been associated with Jacob's sin, sweeping all of it away, and leaving the man to die a dependant in Egypt, God had shewn that through an ardent religious faith there may come to posterity a nobler legacy than riches could ever bestow. God had given to them Moses, through whom He had founded civil liberty, and also Aaron, through whom He had established spiritual worship. A man can be nothing without a nation; a nation can be nothing without leaders; leaders can be nothing without God to raise them up and to cause them to be strong. In the battles of Homer and Virgil, it is the leaders who are made to do all the effective fighting. That is a true picture of life in one sense, and in another sense it is very untrue. No nation can come to the greatness of many triumphs where the people do not bear the brunt of the battle; but then, no people ever did strive on to continuous victory, to whom God had not given strong leaders to guide and control their energy. The people are the force; true leaders are its right application. In these gifts of leading men to a nation, we see what have been termed God's more quiet providences. They, also, are a gift of power. Here we see nothing of force as symbolised in the strong wind, the thunder, and the earthquake; but rather of force as seen in the dew, the air, the light, and the still small voices of nature. In some gifts God displays power; in others He prepares power. Such a preparation and treasuring of power is in God's gift of real men to form the mind of a nation. 2. *In choosing or rejecting the families which composed their nation.* "And I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau." Yet Jacob alone became the father of Israel, and Esau was portioned off with Mount Seir. If Esau's family had blended with that of Jacob, probably Israel would never have had even the measure of religious life which it eventually possessed. At so early a stage in the national history, the more open and reckless character of Esau, with his lack of reverence for the godly traditions of his fathers, could not but have exercised a bad influence. In matters like these we can see but little; we can see but little more than this, God makes of whom He will the nation and the people whom He would call His own. **III. Men asked to reflect on God's mighty triumphs.** 1. *In delivering them from bondage.* "I have brought your fathers out of Egypt." God loves to deliver men from the toil of bondage; from the shame and pain of bondage; from the social wrongs of bondage. 2. *In the overthrow of powerful enemies.* The Egyptians, by the miracle at the Red Sea (ver. 6, 7). The Amorites, by ordinary warfare and the supernatural imposition of fear (ver. 8, 12). Balak and Balaam, by wonderful and various instruments: now a voice, and then a vision; here an angel, there an ass (ver. 9, 10). The tribes of the assembled Canaanites, by the overthrow of the walls of Jericho. God had done great things for the people, whereof Joshua would see them glad. God would have us to sing of His triumphs for us, in order that the joy of the Lord may be our strength for yet more triumphs. **IV. Men bidden to contemplate God's gracious gifts** (ver. 13). They had a land for almost no labour, cities without building, and vineyards and oliveyards which others had planted. 1. *No man is so poor but he has some of God's gifts on which his eye may rest every day.* 2. *The gifts which a man has in sight are the fruit of many other gifts of God which are no longer visible.* Our daily bread is with us, but not the rain and the genial influences of light and heat by which God produced the harvest. Raiment is ours, but a thousand good and too often forgotten things lie unseen behind every garment which we wear. It is so with health, with capital, and with the social possessions in a man's household. There

is a crown laid up in heaven, but it is because of the cross on Calvary. There is a good hope of eternal life, and that, too, is "through grace" which was long poured out, ere such hope entered into the heart by which it is cherished.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verse 1.—The Assembly at Shechem.** Calvin and a few others have thought that this meeting at Shechem was part of the same gathering as that of which we have a record in the preceding chapter. On this the English editor of Calvin remarks: "It may be that the two chapters refer only to one meeting; but certainly the impression produced by a simple perusal of them is, that they refer to two distinct meetings, between which some interval of time must have elapsed. It is only by means of laboured criticism, accompanied with a degree of straining, that some expositors have arrived at a different conclusion. But why should it be deemed necessary to employ criticism for such a purpose? There is surely no antecedent improbability that Joshua, after all the turmoils of war were over, should have more than once come forth from his retirement and called the heads of the people, or even the whole body of them, together, to receive his counsels, when he felt that the time of his departure was at hand. Observe, moreover, that each meeting is ushered in by its own appropriate preamble, and has its own special business. In the one, Joshua speaks in his own name, and delivers his own message; in the other, all the tribes are regularly assembled, and are said to have 'presented themselves before God,' because, although Joshua was still to be the speaker, he was no longer to speak in his own name, but with the authority of a divine messenger, and in the very terms which had been put into his mouth. Accordingly, the first words he utters are, 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel.' The message thus formally and solemnly announced in chap. xxiv. 2, is continued verbatim and without interruption to the end of verse 18."

**Verses 2, 3.—The God of Abraham.** In these verses, which speak of God's dealings with Abraham, three things may be noticed:

**I. The memory of the Lord.** 1. *The Lord remembers who our fathers were.* Terah is spoken of as the father of Abraham and Nachor, and Abraham as the father of Israel. God remembers our early training, with all its faults, and with all its advantages. 2. *The Lord remembers where our fathers dwelt.* "From the other side of the flood." He not only knows what our home was, but what our country was. 3. *The Lord remembers what our fathers worshipped.* "They served other gods."

**II. The grace of the Lord.** "I took your father Abraham." 1. *This was the choice of one possibly an idolater.* However that may have been, God chose the child of an idolater, out of whom to raise up to Himself a separated nation and a peculiar people. God loves to give us examples of what His grace can do with men at their worst. 2. *The man so graciously chosen was most patiently led.* "I led him throughout all the land of Canaan."

**III. The goodness of the Lord.** "And multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac." Whom God calls, them He also leads; and whom He thus leads about from place to place, He neither forsakes nor forgets. He bestows upon them precious gifts. When He gathers them home to Himself, He perpetuates their name on earth in their children. God shews Himself interested, not only in good men, but in their children; He thinks of them as the descendants of those who lovingly obeyed His call.

**Verses 4—7.—The Mysteries of Divine Providence.**

**I. God not only provides for His people, but prevents by His goodness those who might hinder them.** "I gave unto Esau mount Seir, to possess it."

**II. God not seldom provides for His people by taking from them all which they possess.** "Jacob and his children went down into Egypt." (Cf. pp. 289, 290.)

**III. God who provides for His people loss and captivity, provides for them, also, a way back into liberty.** "I sent Moses also, and Aaron . . . I plagued Egypt . . . I brought your fathers out of Egypt," etc.

**IV. The liberty which God provides for His people may be only the liberty of a wilderness, but, even there, His hand effectually sustains them.** "Ye dwelt in the wilderness a long season." He can look even upon our desolate places, and say, "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (cf. Isa. xli. 17—19).

Verses 3—5.—THE GODLY MAN'S SILENCE ABOUT HIMSELF.

Joshua, speaking here for God, recounts the names of all his great predecessors, but says nothing whatever of his own. The Lord, speaking through His servant, has somewhat to say of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of Moses, and of Aaron, but nothing of Joshua. God's way is not for any man to extol himself.

Verse 7.—MAN'S POOR PRAYER, AND GOD'S GREAT ANSWER.

**I. Ignorant prayers graciously answered.** "They cried unto the Lord." From the history in Exodus this prayer was evidently little more than the prayer of fear. It was an outcry in extremity (Ex. xiv. 10). It was the prayer of people who knew little of God.

**II. Protection from danger by miraculous hiding.** "He put darkness between you and the Egyptians." God's way of defence is sometimes by openly confronting His people's enemies, and sometimes by concealing His people. Elijah was bidden to hide by the brook Cherith.

**III. Relentless enemies suddenly destroyed.** "He brought the sea upon them, and covered them." Many plagues and warnings had failed to stay the Egyptians in their determination to oppress the Israelites. The unheeded reproofs of God are as so many milestones on the way to destruction, and the last is generally passed even more heedlessly and quickly than the first. God seldom advertises His last reproof as the last. The end comes suddenly (cf. Prov. xxix. 1). It is "a covering" of the offender by inrushing waters.

**IV. A barren wilderness yielding abundance.** "Ye dwelt in the wilderness a long season." When God saves a man, His purpose is to bless that man. The man may defeat that purpose by his sins, but blessing was intended nevertheless. God hears prayer in order that men may often pray again. God delivers in order to keep. He whom God would keep will find enough for a long season, even in a wilderness.

Verses 9, 10.—GOD'S RULE OVER THE SPIRITS OF MEN.

"The turning of Balaam's tongue to bless Israel, when he intended to curse them, is often mentioned as an instance of the Divine power put forth in Israel's favour, as remarkable as any other, because in it God proved His dominion over the powers of darkness and over the spirits of men."—[*M. Henry.*]

Verse 12.—THE HORNETS AND THE AMORITES.

"The words, 'I sent hornets before you, and thou didst drive out (the Canaanites and) the two kings of the Amorites, not by thy sword nor by thy bow,' point out the Divine promise: 'I will send hornets before thee, that they may drive out before thee the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites' (Ex. xxiii. 28; Deut. vii. 20), as now fulfilled, and must be explained in agreement with those passages. *Tsir'āh* is the hornet, the largest specimen of wasp. The article denotes a species, namely, the hornets, as a peculiar species of animals. Most of the earlier expositors understood these words in their literal signification; and Bochart, whose extensive reading is well known, has cited from Pliny, Justin, and Aelian, various accounts of the ancients, which tell of whole tribes that were driven from their possessions by frogs, mice, wasps, and other small animals. But the arguments by which Rosenmüller still defends the literal interpretation of the verse before us are not convincing. The decision of this point does not depend upon the question whether hornets could become a plague sufficiently fearful to compel a whole population to leave their abodes, nor, on the other hand, upon the absence of any account of the Canaanites having been thus expelled by hornets (for we willingly grant that the Old Testament does not contain a record of *every* single event), but upon the question whether we are at liberty to refer these words to a particular plague with which God afflicted the Canaanites. This must have been the case if we are to take the words literally; for we cannot possibly suppose, as C. a Lapide does, that God always sent hornets before the Israelites on both sides of the Jordan, which

so plagued the Amorites and Canaanites, that 'the Hebrews, who followed, easily slew them with their swords and defeated them with their arrows.' So universal a plague would certainly have been recorded in the history of the conquest of Canaan. But to refer the words to one single plague would be opposed to the context, not only in the passage before us, but also in Ex. xxiii. 28, and Deut. vii. 20. In these two passages the hornets are described as the means by which God would drive out before Israel, not only one Canaanitish tribe in particular, but *all* the Canaanites; for the three tribes, the Hivites, Hittites, and Canaanites, stand for the whole. And, according to the verse before us, not merely the seven tribes of Canaan on this side of the Jordan, but the two kings of the Amorites on the other side, were driven out by hornets. A figurative interpretation is therefore evidently necessary, and the only one which is admissible."—[*Keil.*]

"NOT WITH THY SWORD, NOR WITH THY BOW." The sword may be man's, but God nerves the arm which wields it. The bow may be in human hands, but God guides the arrow. God is both the courage of the pursuing conqueror, and the terror of the fleeing foe. Thus, the battle is ever the Lord's. (Cf. Ps. xliv. 3.)

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 14—18.

### CHOOSING GODS.

Every man needs a god. The consciousness of this need is not to be lightly shaken off. A man's god is his individual choice, and tells us, not merely what he does worship, but what he would worship. Thus every man's religion is an expression of the desires of his own soul. The chosen religion of a human heart is a confession, in all the details of its faith and worship, of that heart's yearnings. The particular god whom we may choose is the delineation of our own conclusions about what is most desirable and most important in life. A man may alter his views of his god, and to that extent he alters his confession. A man may give up one god and choose another. Thus Jehovah called aloud to His people, through Jeremiah: "Pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit."

In Joshua's appeal to the Israelites to choose Jehovah for their God, and in their response, we have the following points for consideration:—

I. The choice of God for our God is a matter of liberty, and not of compulsion. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." After bringing the Israelites into this good land with a high hand and an outstretched arm, God speaks to them through the man whom He had raised up to lead them to so many victories, and gives them absolute freedom of choice. All this was in a solemn meeting, convened before God for this very purpose. The Lord gives us all equal liberty under the gospel. He will have no service which is not of the heart's own choosing. 1. *Think of the choice of gods in the light of conscience.* What says our sense of right? If it "seem evil" to a man to serve the Lord, the verdict of conscience should have weight. The word of God comes to us full of conscious purity. Whether it speaks to us in the Old Testament, or in the New, or in the person of Jesus Christ, it seems ever full of the feeling, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" 2. *Think of the choice of gods in the light of reason.* What says the mind on this great question? Men are to weigh the evidences; they are to consider how things "seem" on either hand, and then choose. The Bible never plays the ecclesiastic with us. It never says, "Do not read for yourself; do not think for yourself; submit yourself to the authority of the Church." On the contrary, the Scriptures bid every man to see for himself, to think for himself, to decide for himself. When the blind come to Christ, be the blindness physical or religious, He ever loves to begin with them by opening their eyes. God never shrinks from the enquiry of the intelligence which He has created in us. Whoever else may be nervous before the intense questionings of man's investigation, the voice of the Bible betrays no trembling. 3. *Think of the choice of gods in the light of love.* What answer does the heart make on this

matter? This is a far more important item in our decision than the verdict of the understanding. After all, it is "with the heart man believeth." If the heart be set on pleasure, the mind will decide against Christ's self-denial. If the heart be ambitious, it will ignore the Saviour's meekness and lowliness. If the heart be selfish, it will conclude that the self-sacrifice of the cross has "no form nor comeliness" sufficient to make it desirable. 4. *Think of the choice of gods in the light of example.* What says our neighbour? What say our best neighbours? What do the greatest benefactors of their fellow-men say? If men who by their own merits have risen to a chief place among their fellows, if the Joshuas of history are found crying, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," that should have some weight in our decision. Good citizens have sometimes been found with little religion; but, if history be fairly read, the best helpers of men are found on the side of the Bible.

Thus, the word of God appeals to the whole of a man's being, and to all life. Conscience, reason, love, or history, it matters not which is consulted; and if all are consulted, so much the better. They who thus enquire will be among the first to cry, "This God is our God for ever and ever." II. Seeing that God is what He is, the very liberty which God gives becomes a compulsion. 1. *The works of God for men are an unmistakable manifestation of His deep love.* The Israelites could not but have felt the reality of Divine love, as displayed in the mighty works of which they had just been reminded. God had done great things for them; they might well feel glad, even in thinking on His mighty acts. God has done for us all, in Christ, far more than He did for these Israelites. His very deeds for us are such a revelation of His heart as might well compel us to choose Him for ever. Emerson has written, in half a dozen subtle lines, this:

> "Nature centres into balls;
> And her proud ephemerals,
> Fast to surface and outside,
> Scan the profile of the sphere;
> Knew they what that signified,
> A new genesis were here."

So it is. Nature is all rolled into balls. The earth is a ball. The sun is a ball. The moon and stars are balls. And we, proud, ephemeral creatures, stuck fast to the outside of one of the balls, which we call earth, scan the profile of this ball, or of one of those other balls up in the heavens, and know almost nothing of what we so readily conclude we have seen.

> "Knew we what *that* signified,
> A new genesis were here."

The very fulness of wisdom and power and love displayed in the creation of a single world, could we understand all, might perhaps be well-nigh enough to generate us into new creatures towards the Creator. But in Jesus Christ we look upon the profile of God Himself; and every feature in the life of the Saviour tells of the love of God. 2. *With all this fulness of love, God leaves every man his liberty.* He says, "Choose whom ye will serve." Love and liberty, together, tend to hold the heart as nothing else can. Force forges no links so stout as those of freedom. Might has no ties so matchlessly strong as those of love. God loves as no mother ever did love, and then asks if we choose to leave Him? The very question might well bring us into a life-long bondage. Mahomet said: "Paradise is under the shadow of swords." So it may be, as to our poor little political man-made heavens. Men, in their earthly kingdoms, can only keep up any semblance of heaven by holding over their petty paradises the sign of blood and pain and death. Peace, born of the blades of war; that is the peace which communities of men manage to get into. Sword-made heavens are ours here; sword-made, and sword-kept. So far the Gospel according to Mahomet—"Paradise is under the shadow of swords." No one is much tempted to sing, "And must I leave thee, paradise?" about that kind of thing. Then God shews us His way of making para-

dise. He shews us power enough to crush, easily, all opposition to His will. He leads His people up from bondage with a strong hand, and with a tender heart. The sea is nothing to Him; the wilderness is nothing; Jordan is nothing; fortified cities are nothing. God leads His people where He will; He keeps them as the apple of His eye. He does this year after year; and then, as their great earthly leader is about to die, God musters the hosts for whom He has so long and so blessedly cared, and says, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." There is only one thing to say before love like that: "God forbid that we should forsake Jehovah to serve other gods." Before a similar experience of mercy and love, and in answer to the Saviour's similar question, Peter, of necessity, similarly answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." **III. He who thinks fairly on God's claims finds the compulsion to choose and serve God irresistible.** Brought face to face with what God had done for them, and thinking on the gracious way in which God appealed to them, the people could only declare themselves on the Lord's side. He who will only think of God, and keep thinking, must follow God. 1. *Here is the compulsion of admiration.* The people dwelt on Jehovah's works as though they would say, "Who is a god like unto our God?" 2. *Here is the compulsion of gratitude.* God had done so much for them, that they felt they were not their own. Really reflecting on the love and grace of Jehovah, they acknowledged themselves drawn irresistibly to Him. Mr. Cooke, in his recent lectures in Boston, has thus retold an ancient classical story: "When Ulysses sailed past the isle of the Sirens, who had the power of charming by their songs all who listened to them, he heard the sorcerers' music on the shore, and, to prevent himself and crew from landing, he filled their ears with wax, and bound himself to the mast with knotted thongs. Thus, according to the subtile Grecian story, he passed safely the fatal strand. But when Orpheus, in search of the Golden Fleece, went by this island, he—being, as you remember, a great musician—set up better music than that of the Sirens, enchanted his crew with a melody superior to the alluring song of the sea nymphs, and so, without needing to fill the Argonauts' ears with wax, or to bind himself to the mast with knotted thongs, he passed the sorcerous shore not only safely, but with disdain." God does not keep us from hearing all that can be said of other gods, which are no gods; God does not bind us by force, so that we cannot seek and follow them; He does but make "better music," and ask us to choose for ourselves. If men do not choose to serve Him, it is because they have closed their eyes to His wonderful works, and stopped their ears against His gracious words.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

**Verses 14, 15.—The Pleadings of Holy Love.**

**I. Joshua's recognition of every man's spiritual liberty.** He saw that every man could choose, would choose, and must choose for himself. 1. *Men compelled to serve, would be only slaves, and God seeks sons.* 2. *Men compelled to serve, would render only the obedience of the hands, and God is satisfied with nothing less than the love of the heart.* 3. *Men compelled to serve, would be utterly miserable, and God's great desire is to make them supremely happy.*

**II. Joshua's urgency to bring every man into subjection to God.** 1. *The absence of force is no sign of want of love.* He who ignores force does not necessarily undervalue persuasion. He who refuses to coerce is in a better position to persuade. 2. *All religious persecution has been a mistake from the beginning.* Even the days before "the dark ages" were far too bright to suffer an error like this. By His example, God has said from the beginning: "Put up thy sword into its sheath;" "My kingdom is not of this world." All the time spiritual liberty is inherent and essential, "religious persecution" is a solecism of speech, and a contradiction of human life. The whole thing is self-condemned, even before we come in sight of the principles of Christianity.

III. Joshua's qualifications for pleading with his fellow-men. We have in these words—1. *The appeal of a man having much knowledge of the human heart.* Joshua saw that the people were faithful and earnest now. He would make them still stronger in all that was good. He knew how fickle men are. He also knew that men were open to abiding impressions from the appeals of truth and manliness. 2. *The appeal of a man with deep and firm convictions about God.* He was convinced of God's claims; of God's supreme and incomparable glory; that the highest interests both of individual men and of the nation lay in serving Him. 3. *The appeal of a man with much personal fitness for the work.* Joshua's advanced age; his large experience in God's service; his high authority with the people; his choice of the time; the tact and wisdom of his words. 4. *The appeal of a man whose own life was a noble example.* Joshua had been remarkably true to God all his life long. He had been "faithful among the faithless," even when Moses and Aaron had more or less gone astray. Joshua was equally resolved to be faithful to the last. Let others choose as they might, he and his would serve the Lord to the end. The plea of the aged man's words was noble; the plea from his beautiful life was nobler still.

Verse 14.—The Obligations arising from God's Goodness.

I. God's works for men should impose fear. "Now therefore fear the Lord."

II. God's works for men should provoke service. "And serve Him."

III. God's works for men should induce realness. "Serve Him in sincerity and in truth."

IV. God's works for men should lead to sanctification. "Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt."

Verse 15, last clause.—Personal Decision for God.

I. Joshua decided for himself, even though he should be left by himself. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Whatever help and encouragement may be derived from fellowship with others in things general, there are great aspects of life in which the soul is isolated and alone. 1. *The individuality of the soul's want.* All our spiritual bread is eaten in secret. 2. *The solitude of the soul's life.* "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." There are other things, also, with which "a stranger doth not intermeddle." 3. *The loneliness of the soul in death.* Not only in some places in life, but at the end of life, men stand where their fellows cannot reach them. "We must die alone." It is well that we should choose for our God one on whom we can rely when we are placed where no one of our fellows can reach us. Joshua felt so confident in Jehovah, that, let others do as they might, he would serve the Lord. His household were of the same mind with himself. It is not necessary to think that Joshua really decided for his house, as some suggest, excepting to determine that no other gods should be worshipped in the place where his authority imposed upon him so much of responsibility.

II. Joshua decided for God after a long trial of God. He had tasted and handled and felt, for many years, the joy of the great name which he here commended to others. There had been in his experience—1. *Trials in heavy responsibilities.* Such burdens his position had put upon him daily. 2. *Trials in great emergencies.* As, for instance, in the crossing of the Jordan and the overthrow of Jericho. 3. *Trials in great battles in the open field.* Such were the conflicts at Beth-horon and the waters of Merom. 4. *Trials in painful defeats.* He could remember how God failed him not at Ai. Besides all this, there were the (5.) *Trials of his own spiritual life.* These, amidst such great daily cares and temptations, could hardly have been small. Joshua looked back on what God had been to him in all this, and said, "I will serve the Lord."

III. What Joshua decided individually, that he avowed openly. 1. *The servant of God can afford to confess God.* This is a name that brings

much glory, and no real shame. 2. *The confession of the faithful man tends to strengthen faithfulness still more.* To confess God is to stand openly committed to serve God, and the very decision gives strength. Cæsar meditating at the Rubicon was Cæsar in his weakness; after the words, "the die is cast," he seemed almost another man. 3. *To confess our love to God is due, not only to ourselves, but to others.* They too may be made strong by our firmness. What Joshua so firmly says, the people, at once, firmly echo. 4. *To confess ourselves on the Lord's side is due, most of all, to the Lord Himself.* He by whom we are all that we are, may well be acknowledged, even though we should have to stand quite by ourselves. As Henry well says, "Those that are bound for heaven must be willing to swim against the stream, and must not do as the most do, but as the best do."

Verse 15.—"I WILL SERVE THE LORD."

"'As for me and my house,' said Joshua, 'we will serve the Lord;' and doubtless he would have said, 'If my house will not, still, as for me, I will.'

"In response to Joshua's appeal, say ye after this fashion:—

"I. Some of my friends have made up their minds for wealth; I will serve God, and live for Him.

"II. Some of my friends have gone in for pleasure; as for me, I will serve God, and live for Him. The paraphrase which Doddridge wrote on his family motto—'While we live, let us live'—shall be my motto:

"'Live while you live, the epicure would say,
And seize the pleasures of the present day.
Live while you live, the sacred preacher cries,
And give to God each moment as it flies.
Lord, in my view let both united be;
I live in pleasure when I live in Thee.'

"III. Some of my friends have gone in for doubt; as for me, I will serve the Lord.

"In doing this, I shall be in good company, in fellowship with the greatest and best of all ages.

"This is a resolution which will stand trial by fire.

"The resolution thus to serve God will stand the test of conscience.

"The resolve to serve God will stand the test of a deathbed. Wealth will not. Earthly dignities and honours will not. Pleasure will not. Unbelief will not.

"The service of God through Christ will stand the test of the judgment-day.

"Come then, young and old, let us enrol ourselves on the Lord's side."—[*Dr. Kennedy.*]

"It is not enough to have made a good beginning, but he who perseveres to the end shall be saved. (Matt xxiv. 13.)

"God can put up with no mixed religion; with Him it is 'all mine, or let it alone altogether.' (Matt. iv. 10.)"—[*Osiander.*]

Verse 15.—THE TWO SERVICES.

I. "The service of sin is essentially wrong, and the service of God is essentially right.

II. "The service of sin is essentially degrading, and the service of God is essentially exalting.

III. "The service of sin is essentially painful, and the service of God is essentially happy.

IV. "The service of sin is essentially destructive, and the service of God is essentially saving."—[*James Parsons.*]

MAN'S POWER OF CHOOSING EVIL.

"That men would be better than they are if they always chose good instead of evil, is evident. But that they would be better, or indeed, could have a rational existence, if they had not the power of choosing evil instead of good, is the most foolish and presumptuous of fancies."—[*Sterling.*]

Verses 16—18.—GOOD WORDS RIGHTLY SPOKEN.

I. The influence of good words spoken in a right way.

II. The influence of good words spoken at a fit time.

III. The influence of one man's confession upon others.

Verses 16—18.—Forsaking the Lord God.

I. Devout horror at the thought of forsaking God. 1. *The recoil of loving hearts from the suggestion of apostasy.* "God forbid that we should forsake the Lord." 2. *The contempt of the truly pious for idolatry.* "That we should forsake Jehovah to serve other gods."

II. Holy admiration of God. 1. *It is one thing to resolve not to forsake God, and another to adore and love Him.* 2. *Where God is sincerely loved, His tender mercies are gratefully remembered.* 3. *They who love God much, so far from fearing His power, make it their delight and confidence.* "Therefore will we also serve the Lord." 4. *They who love and serve God sincerely, ever find a possession in God.* "For He is our God."

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 19—28.

God Trying and Taking Pledges of His People's Love.

It should not be forgotten that in these further words of Joshua he is still to be regarded as the mouthpiece of Jehovah. While Joshua no longer speaks as in the person of the Lord, the meeting itself becomes more grave in every verse of the record; and so far from thinking of Jehovah, at this stage, as having in some measure withdrawn from the meeting, leaving it to be concluded by His servant, we are rather to think of God as so manifestly present in the increased solemnity of the words, that it is no longer necessary that His presence should be outwardly and formally asserted in the mere style of the address. While it might seem to us that Joshua is speaking, we are told, by the very form of the language, that it is Jehovah; when the increased solemnity of the meeting proclaims indisputably the continued voice of the Lord, it is no longer thought necessary to assure us formally that the words are far more than the mere words of Joshua. It is, verily, for the then present God of Israel that Joshua proceeds to say, "Ye cannot serve Jehovah."

I. Here is a life-long service freely offered by men, and that service apparently discouraged by God. After noticing a superficial attempt to read, "Ye *shall not cease* to serve," for "Ye *cannot* serve the Lord," Dr. Clarke remarks: "If the common reading be preferred, the meaning of the place must be, 'Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is holy and jealous, *unless* ye put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the flood; for He is a jealous God, and will not give to nor divide His glory with any other.'" Undoubtedly the meaning includes this; with almost equal certainty it comprises far more than this. Joshua is not merely saying, You cannot serve Jehovah *with other gods;* he is also asserting, You cannot serve Jehovah at all in your own strength; or, You cannot serve Jehovah at all if you set about it in a thoughtless spirit. God Himself was uttering, through Joshua, for secret purposes of His own, these words of severe rebuff and painful discouragement. Here, then, were people wanting to come to God. The sincerity which they manifested by their subsequent life (cf. ver. 31) was fully known to God when they made this earnest avowal of their choice. Yet here is the voice of the Lord saying, "Ye cannot serve me; my service is all too hard for your endeavours." When a man comes to his fellow, feeling that his fellow can counsel and help him—trusting his wisdom, and pleading his direction—that is the kind of suppliant from whom a true man does not turn away. We had thought that this was the spirit of the Bible also. Does not God say, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me"? Why, then, are these seekers repelled? Does not the Saviour cry in His earthly ministry, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? Why, then, are these who come so earnestly turned away so severely? Does not Christ call to men out of heaven itself, saying, "Behold, I stand at the

door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him"? Why, then, are these who open their hearts to the Lord discouraged by words in which the Lord seems to turn utterly and hopelessly away? Why, when they had been told to choose gods, and had chosen Jehovah with irrepressible ardour, are they thus rejected? Payson remarked: "The man who wants me is the man I want;" in these words, God seems to turn from men just according to the fervour in which they seek His face. As has been pointed out by Dr. Ker, this is no exceptional instance. The "father of the faithful" is the man who is told to offer up his son in sacrifice; and earnest Moses is confronted by the fire and thunder of Sinai, till he exceedingly fears and quakes. David enthusiastically serves his God, and is forthwith driven to ask, "Why do the wicked prosper?" Elijah is faithful when, to him, all seem so faithless that he exclaims, "I only am left;" and yet he is seen fleeing here and there before what appears to be an adverse Providence, till he cries in very despair, "O Lord, take away my life; I am not better than my fathers." This trial of earnestness is no less frequent in the New Testament than in the Old. The Saviour talks to the ardent Syrophœnician woman about dogs to whom it is not meet to give the children's bread. To the eager Magdalene, who seeks to embrace Him, He calmly replies, "Touch me not." The young lawyer whom Jesus loved was told to sell all that he had, and give it to the poor; and the scribe who proclaimed his desire to follow Christ everywhere was checked by the assurance that he was seeking to follow one who had "not where to lay His head." Similarly, when Saul cried, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Jesus answered back, through Ananias, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer." We look at all this, and there remains, among others, this one conclusion: Trial is no sign that God does not love us. Even the discouragements of men, which seem to come direct from heaven, are only another phase of Divine affection. Emerson says, "A lady with whom I was riding in the forest said to me that the woods always seemed to her *to wait*, as if the genii who inhabited them suspended their deeds until the wayfarer has passed onward, a thought which poetry has celebrated in the dance of the fairies, which breaks off on the approach of human feet." When walking in the woods in earlier days, I have often felt the same. I have looked into the quiet shadow-arches made by masses of overhanging foliage, and have felt, in the intense stillness, as if everything were *waiting* till I had gone. The silence has seemed so unusual—a great suspense, rather than a normal condition. So when the silence of God seems emphasized in some great trial or discouragement, the believing man may have his fancies, which are more than fancies. He may say, "This is not the usual mind of God. He often breaks in upon this silence. Of that I am sure. I have heard His voice, and the tones are the tones of love. He is only waiting till I have passed. For the time, and for some reason, He knows it is best that I should not see Him, and that I should hear from Him no voice of encouragement whatever." The silence is not the real mind of God. It is a Divine feint. It is as when Jesus "made as if He would go further," and did not go. It is as when He said, "I go not up yet unto the feast," but went very shortly after. God conceals His real movements, now in silence, now in actions which mislead, or now, as here, in words which seem full of rebuff, but which, no less for their seeming, He would have us read as an enticement. **II. Here are loving hearts discouraged by God, and yet clinging to God even more lovingly and persistently than before.** "Nay; but we will serve the Lord." Joshua was feigning to break them off from their choice, and they asserted their determination more ardently than ever. It is as though a mother should feign to shut the door against her little child, and he, refusing to read his mother's heart thus, should become all the more earnest because the door seemed about to be closed, well knowing all the time that his little strength was no match for hers. God gives these contrary voices to provoke our zeal. He hides His heart, that we may the more anxiously search out His real feeling. He turns us back,

that out of our alarm and resistance we may press forward indeed. He seems to shut the door against us, that in our zeal to re-open it we may quicken our own energies, and so attract the attention of those about us, that they may say, "That man is a Christian;" and thus, ere ever we are aware, God would have us find ourselves committed to His service before all men. The Saviour does but call the Gentile woman a dog, that she may both know and shew that she is a child, and that He may quicken her appetite for the children's bread. Said Martin Luther's wife to him on one occasion: "Doctor, how is it that while subject to the papacy we prayed so often and so earnestly, while now we pray with the utmost coldness, and very seldom?" Few of us can be good disciples of the Crucified when we ourselves have no cross. It is not so much of the Lord's desire as of our own necessity that "through much tribulation we *must* enter into the kingdom." It is exactly when in the hearing of voices which cry, "Ye cannot serve God," that we find our holiest firmness to reply, "Nay; but we will." **III. Here is persistent love accepted by God, on the understanding that men offer their love to no other gods.** "Now therefore put away the strange gods. Jehovah is a jealous God." 1. *The Lord is jealous for His own glory.* 2. *The Lord is jealous for the supremacy of truth.* 3. *The Lord is jealous for the good of the worshippers.* 4. *The Lord is jealous for beholders, whom the worshippers continually influence.* When cherishing our idols of the heart, we shall do well to remember that all around us there are places where some of our fathers have put away gods that were false and strange. The oak of Jacob, at Shechem (Gen. xxxv. 4), seemed in itself to admonish Jacob's childen (ver. 26). **IV. Here is accepted love recklessly witnessing against its own future inconstancy, and pledging itself to love and serve God for ever.** "Ye are witnesses against yourselves." "We are witnesses." True love makes no provision for infidelity. It provides no way of retreat. It "burns the bridges" by which otherwise it might be tempted to go back. 1. *Men who turn from God should remember that there are many voices witnessing against them, among which no voice speaks so loudly as their own.* 2. *When human voices seem to the backslider to hold their peace, the very stones nevertheless cry out against him* (ver. 27). Such witness would be borne by the stone now set up by Joshua. 3. *Those who really love God rather rejoice in such testimony than view it with fear.* Love enters into solemn covenant; it delights to know that the covenant is recorded, and that the record is made in an enduring form. Even the witness of the imperishable stone is regarded with no disfavour.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 19.—"God Declining First Offers of Service."

"This procedure, on the part of God," may arise from the following reasons:

**I. "It sifts the true from the false seeker.** The gospel comes into the world to be a touchstone of human nature—to be Ithuriel's spear among men. There is enough in it to attract and convince every man who has a sense of spiritual need and a desire of spiritual deliverance, but it is presented in such a form as to try whether the soul really possesses this, and therefore we may have obstacles of various kinds at the very entrance. Bunyan's Pliable and Christian at the Slough of Despond. . . .

**II. "It leads the true seeker to examine himself more thoroughly.** If a man is accepted, or thinks he is accepted, at once, he takes many things for granted which it would be well for him to enquire into. Very specially is this the case in regard to the nature of sin, and the light in which God regards it. Almost all the errors of our time, or of any time, have their root here, and it would be well for many to be sent back for reflection with the words of Joshua—'He is an holy God, He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your

transgressions nor your sins.' Not that Joshua would lead them to doubt God's mercy, but he would have them to see that it is a more difficult question than men in general fancy. The easy complacency with which some talk of pardon, and their assurance of it, springs more from dulness of conscience than strength of faith. . . .

**III. "It binds a man to his profession by a stronger sense of consistency.** There is a paper of obligations put into our hands to sign, and when we take the pen, we are bidden to read it over again and ponder it, that we may subscribe with clear consciousness of the contents. God will beguile no man into His service by false pretences. He stops us when we would rush into it thoughtlessly, tells us the nature of the work, what His own character gives Him a right to expect of us, and then, if we will still go forward, He can say, 'Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve Him,' and we are compelled to own, 'We are witnesses.' . . .

**IV. "It educates us to a higher growth and greater capacity of happiness.** When we see the wind shaking a young tree, and bending it to the very earth, it may seem to be retarding its rise, but it is furthering it. It is making it strike its roots deeper into the ground, that its stem may rise higher and stronger, till it can struggle with tempests, and spread its green leaves to a thousand summers. . . . In the intellectual world, a strong mind thrives on difficulties. There is no falser method of education than to make all smooth and easy, and remove every stone before the foot touches it. . . . 'The kingdom of heaven,' as Christ has declared, 'suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force,' that the man may prove himself the better soldier, and receive of God at last a brighter crown."—[*Dr. Ker.*]

Verse 19.—God's Holiness, Jealousy, and Forgiveness.

**I. The relation of God's holiness to His forgiveness.** "For He is an holy God: He will not forgive." He is too holy to forgive lightly. As surely as a man's righteousness has its inalienable rights, so certainly a man's sin has its just deserts, and the demerit of transgression cannot lightly be passed over without a corresponding depreciation in the value of rectitude and piety.

**II. The relation of God's jealousy to His forgiveness.** "He is a jealous God: He will not forgive." God is very jealous for His good name. He would ever keep it as "a strong tower," into which the righteous know that they may run with safety. The name of a wicked ruler affords no security to his faithful subjects. Many kings have been a terror to good and a shelter to evil doers. For the sake of men, and of truth, God is too jealous of His name ever to let the wicked say: "We may sin as we like; we are certain to be forgiven."

**III. The influence of God's forgiveness upon man's religious service.** "Ye cannot serve the Lord: He will not forgive." The unforgiven have no heart to serve. "We are saved by hope." "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." "The joy of the Lord is our strength" for the service of the Lord. Who can labour for God, knowing that God holds him under condemnation!

The Necessity of Preserving Holiness.

"Without holiness there can be no such heaven as the New Testament reveals. There may be scenery of surpassing grandeur—mountains, woods, rivers, and skies most charming; but they do not make a heaven, else a heaven might be found in Wales or Cumberland. There may be a capital full of palaces and temples; but they do not make a heaven, else a heaven might have been found in Delhi. There may be buildings of marble and precious stones; but they do not make a heaven, else a heaven might have been found in Rome or Venice. There may be health, and ease, and luxury. and festivities; but they do not make a heaven, else one would have been met with in Belshazzar's halls. There may be education, philosophy, poetry, literature, art; but that will not make a heaven, else the Greeks would have

had one in Athens, in the grove and in the porch. Holiness is that without which no heaven could exist."—[*Dr. Stoughton.*]

THE LORD IMPRESSING HIS HOLINESS UPON THE MINDS OF THE ISRAELITES.

"In the Temple, even every 'little' ornament of the mighty structure that crowned the cliffs of Zion was 'holy' to the Lord. Not the great courts and inner shrines and pillared halls merely, but all. Not a carven pomegranate, not a bell, silver or golden, but was 'holy.' The table and its lamps, with flowers of silver light, tent and staves, fluttering curtain and ascending incense, altar and sacrifice, breastplate and ephod, mitre and gem-clasped girdle, wreathen chains and jewelled hangings—over all was inscribed HOLY, while within, in the innermost shrine, where God manifested Himself above the mercy-seat, was THE HOLIEST. Thus the utter holiness of that God with whom they had to do was by every detail impressed upon the heart and conscience of ancient Israel."—[*Grosart.*]

Verse 20.—FORSAKING GOD.

**I. To forsake the true God is ever to serve strange gods.**

**II. To forsake God is to be forsaken by God.**

**III. To be forsaken by God is to be presently hurt and consumed by God.**

Verse 21.—THE INTERPRETING AND DETERMINING POWER OF A LOVING HEART.

**I. Pious love instinctively interpreting the trying words of God.** Joshua had said, "Ye cannot serve Jehovah." The people immediately answered back, "Nay; but we will serve Jehovah." They never for a moment understood that such service was absolutely impossible. Loving God indeed, their hearts read, even through the contrary words, the love that was in the heart of God.

**II. Pious love firmly determining to adhere to God.** Whether they could serve or not, they would. The heart that loves the holy and merciful God cannot take "No" for an answer. Love says: "If I perish, I will pray, if I get no reward, I will nevertheless serve." And such love ever triumphs, when it pleads resolutely with God. However readily the wicked may spurn a loving heart away, the kingdom of heaven always "*suffereth* violence, and the violent take it by force." "Love never faileth," when it contends with God. Thus, the people who say, "*We will serve*," are ever taken then and there into covenant

Verses 22—25.—ENTERING INTO COVENANT WITH GOD.

**I. No reservation must be made in the direction of sin.** Men must be prepared even to witness against themselves. They must come to enter into covenant with God with a mind which contemplates no excuse for sin.

**II. Sin itself must be first put away.** "Put away the strange gods which are among you." God will enter into no covenant with those who deliberately cherish sin.

**III. God Himself must be unhesitatingly and persistently chosen.** 1. *He must be chosen in the heart.* "Incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel." 2. *He must be chosen openly* The declaration was made by the people before each other. 3. *He must be chosen with no faltering purpose.* "The Lord our God will we serve." Though the service be fairly stated as severe and difficult, there must be no hesitation. 4. *He must be chosen with a submissive spirit.* "And His voice will we obey."

**IV. The covenant thus made with God must be made through a mediator.** The covenant is made with the mediator on behalf of the people. The covenant is recorded by the mediator for the joy of all who are faithful, and for a witness against all transgressors. Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, also makes record of every man's utterance who says, "The Lord God will I serve." The names of those who have truly confessed Jesus are written "in the Lamb's book of life."

**V. The covenant is preliminary to rest in the life which now is, and for that also which is to come.** When

the covenant was made, then, and not till then, the people departed "every man unto his own inheritance." No man can truly enter into rest, excepting through Jesus. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Till a man is at peace with God, he can have little real joy in his own inheritance. He only is wise, who, before setting himself to enjoy his earthly estate, accepts the invitation of Jesus: "Come unto me . . . I will give you rest."

Verses 22, 27.—God's Witnesses against the Sinner.

**I. The witness which a man bears against his own sin.** "Ye are witnesses against yourselves." "We are witnesses." How many insincere worshippers are daily witnessing against themselves. In their attendance in God's house. In the songs of the sanctuary. In the religious instruction which they impart, or cause to be imparted, to their children, etc. Surely the Judge may say again presently, "Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee, thou wicked servant!"

**II. The witness borne against a sinful man by his fellows.** Joshua was a witness of the people's choice. Every man was a witness against every other. "We also are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses." They are not mere spectators of our course, but testifiers (μάρτυρες). Like the martyrs and others spoken of in Heb. xi, they bear witness to the blessedness of faith and faithful service; they testify, in like manner, against all who "refuse Him that speaketh."

**III. The witness borne against a sinful man by the ordinary records of life.** "Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us, for it hath heard," etc. Among the Israelites, this was an ordinary method of providing testimony. Not only this stone, set up by Joshua at Shechem, would bear witness against Israel's unfaithfulness; other monuments, similarly erected, would bear their testimony also. There were the altars of Abraham (Gen xii. 7, xiii. 4), and Isaac (Gen. xxvi. 25). There was the stone of Bethel, set up by Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 18—22). There were the memorials erected by these Israelites themselves (chap. iv. 4—9, viii. 30—32, xxii. 10). These and other monuments had been raised by themselves and their fathers, and represented so much faith and fervour in bygone days. In any relapse into idolatry, or even carelessness, these memorials would testify against all backsliders. It is ever thus in our days also: every man's past service for God and truth is an almost vocal remonstrance against his future worldliness. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Verse 23.—Jehovah God, and Strange Gods.

**I. God and strange gods cannot be worshipped together.**

**II. Strange gods can be and are to be put away.**

**III. To worship no strange gods is not enough; he who would worship acceptably must incline his heart towards the true God.**

Verse 24.—The Freedom of the Will.

**I. "God of His pleasure leaves us free to do wrong as well as right.** Doubtless God could have created man without giving him liberty of will. He might have formed him merely capable of wishing to do what is right. There is nothing in the soul that shews this freedom to be a part of its nature. We can only believe that it is the will and pleasure of God to create us free from all necessity.

**II. "Conscience urges and our hearts tell us that we have this free power of will.** Our inner feelings continually tell us we are free agents. It is of no avail that we argue down our clearer convictions. Our convictions still tell us that we do wrong, that we are to blame when we do wrong, that we have the power of avoiding our faults. Nature within us utters this truth. All men understand this truth. From the cradle of the child to the study of the philosopher, this truth is everywhere uncontradicted. The race of man over all the earth believes itself free.

**III. "Our daily life assures us that we have this power over our wills.** The same consciousness that assures us we exist, with equal authority tells us that we are free. We may argue, and shuffle our words, we may deceive ourselves, but in actual life we still take this freedom for granted, and move our limbs in the belief that we move them at our own pleasure. Reason as we will, we are yet obliged to follow this persuasion that we are free. The belief that we have power over our

wills, and the daily exercise of this power, are arguments so unanswerable that no man who is not in a dream can deny them. In all the common actions of life it is impossible for a man seriously to question his power to follow his right reason.

IV. **Without freedom to do wrong there could be no virtue.** Could we take away this free will from man, the whole of human life would be overthrown. If men are not free in what they do of good and evil, good is not good, and evil is not evil. If an unavoidable necessity oblige us to wish what we wish, human responsibility is gone; there is no more virtue or vice, praise or blame. There is no religion left upon earth.

V. "**God is with us, helping us to use this power aright.** When God made man free, He did not thereby leave him to himself. He gave him reason to be a light to him. He is Himself with him, to inspire him with goodness, to reprove him for his smallest faults, to lead him on by promises, to hold him back by threats, to melt him by His love. He forgives us, He avenges us, He waits for us. He bears with our neglect, and invites us even to the last. Our life is full of His grace.

"It were terrible to believe that, without any power of his own to do right, man is required by his Maker to attain a virtue quite beyond his reach. No, indeed! man suffers no evil but what he makes for himself. He is able to procure for himself the greatest blessings.

VI. "**In this freedom of will God has given us a part of His own nature.** By making man free, God has given him a strong feature of likeness to Himself. Man's empire over his own will has in it something divine. Master of his own inner movements, he turns to whatever seems to him good. God gave to man a noble power when He made him capable of deserving praise and approbation. What is higher or grander than to deserve? It is the power of rising to a rank and order above our present state. By deserving, man improves and exalts himself, goes forward step by step, and wins his reward. What richer crown of ornament could God put upon His work?"—[*Fenelon.*]

Verse 25.—THE COVENANT AT SHECHEM. "Seven things are to be considered in this renewal of the covenant:—

I. "**The dignity of the mediator.** Take a view of his names, Hosea and Jehoshua. God will save: He will save. The first is like a promise; the second, the fulfilment of that promise. God will save some time or other: this is the very person by whom He will accomplish His promise. Take a view of Joshua's life: his faith, courage, constancy, heroism, and success. A remarkable type of Christ. (See Heb. iv. 8.)

II. "**The freedom of those who contracted.** 'Take away the gods which your fathers served beyond the flood, and in Egypt,' etc. (ver. 14). Consider the liberty of choice which every man has, and which God, in matters of religion, calls into action

III. "**The necessity of the choice.** To be without religion is to be without happiness here, and without any title to the kingdom of God. To have a false religion is the broad road to perdition; and to have the true religion, and live agreeably to it, is the high road to heaven. Life is precarious, death is at the door; the Judge calls; much is to be done, and perhaps there is but little time to do it in. Choose: choose speedily and determinately.

IV. "**The extent of the conditions.** 'Fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth and righteousness.' Consider His being, His power, holiness, justice, *etc.* Religion itself consists of two parts. 1. *Truth.* (*a*) In opposition to the idolatry of the surrounding nations. (*b*) In reference to that revelation which God gave of Himself. (*c*) In reference to that peace and comfort which false religions may promise, but cannot give, and which the true religion communicates to all who properly embrace it. 2. *Uprightness or integrity*, in opposition to those abominable vices by which themselves and the neighbouring nations had been defiled. (*a*) The major part of men have one religion for youth, and another for old age. He who serves God with integrity serves Him with all his heart in every part of life. (*b*) Most men have a religion of times, places, and circumstances. Integrity takes in every time, every place, and every circumstance; God's law ever being kept before the eyes, and His love in the heart, dictating purity and perfection to every thought, word, and work. (*c*) Many content themselves with abstaining from vice, and think themselves sure of the kingdom of God because they do not sin as others. But he who serves God in integrity, not only abstains from the act and appearance of evil, but steadily performs every moral good.

V. "**The peril of the engagement.** This covenant had in it the nature of an oath; for so much the phrase 'before the Lord' implies. . . . . Joshua allows there is a great danger in making this covenant. 'Ye cannot serve the Lord,' *etc.* But this only supposes that nothing could be done right but by His Spirit, and in His strength. The energy of the Holy Spirit is equal to every requisition of God's holy law, as far as it regards the moral conduct of a believer in Christ.

VI. "**The solemnity of the acceptance.** Notwithstanding Joshua faithfully laid down the dreadful evils which those might expect who should abandon the Lord, yet the people entered solemnly into the covenant. 'God forbid that we should forsake the Lord.' 'We will serve the Lord.' They seemed to think that not to covenant in this case was to reject.

VII. "**The nearness of the consequence.** There were false gods among them, and these must be immediately put away (ver. 23). The moment the covenant is made, that same moment the conditions of it come into force. He who makes this covenant with God should immediately break off from every evil design, companion, word, and work."—[*Dr. A. Clarke, from M. Saurin.*]

"THE REPEATED PROFESSION OF THE PEOPLE THAT THEY WILL SERVE THE LORD.

I. "The profession in reference to its import.

II. "The profession in reference to the responsibilities which the people thus took upon them.

"It is easily said, I will serve the Lord and obey His voice; but actually to keep the promise when the world allures to its altars is another thing.

"Israel's resolution to serve the Lord was wholly voluntary. So should it be also with us. There should be no compulsion."—[*Fay.*]

Verses 26, 27.—"THE RELIGIOUS USE OF MEMORIALS.

"This action of Joshua seems a strange importance to be conferred on a piece of insensible matter, on a mere block of stone, unnoticed, perhaps, for a thousand years. '*It hath heard,*' is an excessively strong figure; but it is quite in the Eastern style to give things the attributes of persons.

1. "How little it can be foreseen or conjectured to what use numberless things in the creation, apparently insignificant, are destined by Divine appointment to be applied. They may be entirely unnoticed while waiting that use, with no marks upon them to distinguish them from the most ordinary things of the same kind. The trees for Noah's ark. The rod of Moses. The stones which were to be the tables of the Law, and which were to be written upon by the Almighty. The rams' horns used at the siege of Jericho. The materials destined to the most awful use of all—THE CROSS. There is, as to most of us, now existing, somewhere, the very wood which will form our coffins. Some of us may have passed near the very trees, or the wood no longer in the state of trees. The material bears no mark what it is for; but God has on it His secret mark of its destination. If it were visible, what a reading we should have of inscriptions!—tomb inscriptions, seen beforehand!

2. "The sovereign Lord has some appointed use for everything in creation. The uses of an infinite number of things *we* shall never know; but He can have made nothing but for an use—to that it will come. What a view has He on all things as bearing His destination! What a stupendous prospective vision, if we may express it so, before His mind!

3. "Wise and good men can find for many things many uses, for instruction and piety, which do not occur to other men. If such a man, towards the close of life, could make out an account of the things that have served him to such a purpose, how many things, seeming not in themselves qualified to instruct him, would he have to recount as having been the occasions of his receiving instruction or salutary impressions! . . .

4. "The great leaders of Israel, Moses and Joshua, were solicitous to employ every expedient to secure an eternal remembrance of God in the people's minds. . . . It was not enough that human and even angelic monitors should be speaking. They perceived how constantly the popular mind was withdrawing and escaping from under the impressive sense of an invisible Being; how easily the delusions of the surrounding idolatry stole on their senses and their imagination, to beguile their hearts and their very reason away; how imperfectly the grand scene of nature, of the creation, preserved, in any active force, the thought of the Creator; how apt to grow feeble and faint was their memory of even the miraculous events which themselves had beheld. Accordingly they marked places and times with monuments, built altars, raised heaps of stones, *etc.*

"Now can all this be turned to no good account for us? Have we less of this unhappy tendency to forget things which ought to stand conspicuous in our memory, relative to our concerns with God? What kind of memory have we, for example, of the mercies of God?

"We then, as much as the Israelites, need all manner of aids to revive the memory of them. Valuable advantage may be taken of particular circumstances, aiding us to recall them. '*This stone shall be a witness to us.*' Everything that can be made a *witness* and remembrancer to us is worth being made so. We should not despise its assistance. The place where we were delivered from an accident should be a witness to us. The apartment where an oppressive sickness had brought its victim just to the gate of death; the place in which a person was saved from falling into some great sin; the house, book, letter, in or through which some important lesson of instruction was given at an opportune and critical moment: these, and similar things, should be memorials and witnesses to men. . . .

"A man should take like methods to remember his sins. A man may happen to meet, now sinking in age, a person who once remonstrated against his sinful ways; or he may pass by the grave of one who was once an associate in evil. Let him stand by it and reflect. Or, not to suppose heinous sins, there may be presented to a man various things which will remind him of a careless, irreligious season of his life; a Bible that he cared not to read; articles used for mere vain amusement and waste of time. Now, such monumental witnesses should suggest to a man to think of guilt, repentance, and pardon. He might fix his eyes on those objects while on his bended knees.

"There are men in whose memories are reposited times and places when and where they trembled under '*the terrors of the Lord.*' . . .

"It is wise to seize upon all means of turning the past into lessons of solemn admonition; it is, as it were, bringing it back to be *present*, that we may have it over again. With the instructing, sanctifying influence of the Divine Spirit, we may thus pass again, in thought, over the scenes of our life, and reap certain benefit *now*, even in those where we reaped none *then*."—[*From John Foster's Lectures.*]

## MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 29—31.

### The Character and Influence of Joshua.

Many of the noblest lives have an obscure origin and a lowly beginning. Joshua was born a slave. He was born about the time that Moses fled out of Egypt to Jethro. His name first occurs in the history when he was upwards of forty years of age (Exod. xvii. 9). Eminent or obscure, every life must come to an end. No amount of greatness can confer physical immortality, and no depth of obscurity is sufficient to hide from infirmity, disease, and death. The pages of the Bible are portioned out in sections; on a few of those pages we meet with the name of Noah; on a few, that of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, or some other prominent man; then, when we have passed its section, the particular name, for the most part, occurs no more. Only the name of the Eternal belongs to the Bible throughout. The noblest of men appear only for a time, and then pass away, to make room for others. The Bible is a portrait of human life, and this feature of brevity is also a part of the picture. At this point of the great Scripture story, the name of Joshua begins to give place to those of the succeeding Judges.

I. Joshua's great life and character. 1. *His life was full of trying events.* Moses selected him to lead the Israelites to their first battle. He was chosen, as a strong and wise and good man, to fill one of the most important positions among his people, and from the time of that choice to this time of his death the events of the national life were severely testing the manhood of the man, the capacity of the warrior and the statesman, and the piety of the servant of the Lord. After the trial on the battle-field of Rephidim, Joshua was proved in the matter of patience. For nearly six weeks he seems to have waited in a mysterious solitude, while Moses was upon the mount with God (cf. Exod. xxiv. 13, xxxii. 17). During that period the patience of Aaron and Hur and the elders had failed; they turned to idolatry, and the people with them. Yet Joshua took no part in the sin of the people, and was even ignorant that the calf had been made, attributing the idolatrous shouts of the multitude to "a noise of war in the camp." God had tried the bravery of the soldier; He would no less severely prove the faith and patience of the servant. After the trial in solitude, Joshua was tempted in company. Ten of the spies became so many tempters of the remaining two to murmuring and unbelief. The hosts of Israel joined in the temptation. The loud *vox populi* was urgent and almost unanimous against the silent *vox Dei* which Joshua heard by faith in his own heart. But Joshua and Caleb were firm; they rent their clothes, and remonstrated together against the rebellious multitude. After the death of Moses, the life of this great man was simply full of events calculated to tax his faith and patience to the utmost. Jordan, Jericho, Ai, Bethhoron, and Merom are but a few of the more prominent names representing, not only Joshua's conflicts with great difficulties and strong enemies, but, probably, severe conflicts with himself. Every crisis in the history of the invasion, every battle-field, every day in the long and arduous work of dividing the land, must have brought to Joshua strong temptations to, in some way, forget or dishonour God. Joshua's life was a prolonged excitement in the midst of great events, and each event was a new ordeal. 2. *His character was as great as his life was eventful.* If every day dawned ushering in for Joshua, in his personal life, some new battle, every night seems to have brought him some fresh victory. No word of direct blame is recorded against him throughout his whole history. Only once—when the elders took of the victuals of the Gibeonites, "and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord," and "Joshua made peace" with these deceivers—does there seem to be even a reflection upon his pious faithfulness to God. Among many other things in which this Joshua of the Old Testament seems to prefigure the greater Joshua of the New, so far as a sinful man could do so at all, his life beautifully points us to Him "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His

mouth." Even the beautiful life of Moses is grievously darkened by two transgressions—his murder of the Egyptian, and his unfaithfulness at Meribah; but no similar cloud throws its shadows over the character of Joshua. For absence of self-seeking, and love of his people; for bravery beautified by tenderness; for a strength of will so powerful to control the multitude, and yet a will so docile before the known will and mind of God; for unquestioning obedience in the execution of Divine commands, naturally and severely trying to his humanity and kindness; for a calm and even mind amidst great daily provocations and inducements to go astray; for purity of thought and feeling; for self-continence in the hours of great victories, and in the months and years that followed them; for quiet and continuous zeal for God's glory and his country's good; for real greatness in its union with deep and true humility: for all these things, and others, taken as a combination dwelling in a single character, the world has known few lives so noble as this life, perhaps none nobler, excepting the all-transcending life of Christ. So far as the history of his life is recorded, there seems nothing in which Joshua is open to the blame of men, and nothing in which he becomes subject to the reproof of God. **II. Joshua's honourable death and burial.** 1. *Just before his death we come to what appear to have been the intensest moments of his whole life.* Nothing can be more earnest and beautiful than his appeal to the elders, recorded in chapter xxiii., and the wonderful mingling of dignity, intensity, and love shewn in this chapter, in his pleading with the people. The two addresses shew us conclusively, that Joshua's "long time" of comparative rest in his old age (chap. xxiii. 1) had in no way served to diminish, but rather to increase, his pious concern for himself and his people before God. The two addresses shew that, right up to the end, his life was a growth, not a decay. The death of such a man must of necessity be honourable and beautiful. Our life should be a growth as long as it lasts. There are too many who grow old and cold at the same time. 2. *Joshua's burial has a brief record, but one that befits his life* (ver. 29). There is about it nothing ostentatious—nothing pretentious. "*They* buried him," says the historian. Who are meant by this word "*they*"? The quiet pronoun reads as though it might stand for half the nation: like Joshua himself, it says so little, and yet seems to represent so much. "They buried him *in the border of his inheritance.*" That inheritance itself was one of Joshua's noblest tributes. This dead man had become great in winning so much, and greater still in taking so little. It was meet that the great dead conqueror should be buried in the borders of his own meagre inheritance. Joshua could have no nobler memorial than to be buried in the borders of that comparatively poor estate in Timnath-Serah. Many men defeat their own greatest victories by their manner of disposing of the spoil. To thousands of "Christians," every new conquest and every fresh success in life means as much more estate for themselves as is possible, and as much from their neighbour's as can be conveniently added to their own. **III. Joshua's holy and abiding influence.** "And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua." Being dead, Joshua yet spake. His unselfish and holy life became an abiding power to hold all who had known him steadfast in the faith. The Hindoos have a beautiful epigram, which runs on this wise:

> "Naked on parent's knees, a new-born child
> Thou sat'st and wept, while all around thee smiled:
> So live, that sinking to thy last long sleep,
> Thou then may'st smile, while all around thee weep."

To Joshua himself, his end was, doubtless, peace; to all Israel, it must have been a season of deep and sincere sorrow. And yet, to the mighty host who had known this great man as their leader, these days of gloom and heaviness had a brightness that was slow to fade away. In the eloquent words of the late Bishop Wilberforce, "As on the dark sky, when some flashing meteor has swept across it with a path of fire, there remains still after that glory has departed, a lingering

line of light; so was it with this mighty man, glorious in life, and leaving even after he was gone the record of his abundant faithfulness still to hold for a season heavenward the too wandering eyes of Israel." Thus ever does a good and holy man outlive himself.

## OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verses 29, 30.—"SUNSET ON MOUNT EPHRAIM."

"Here is a glorious orb in the old world sinking peacefully to rest behind the pastoral hills of Ephraim. Joshua was in every sense of the word a great character, a saintly hero,—the man not only of his age, but of many ages. If his name does not shine so conspicuously amid the galaxy of patriarchs and ancient worthies, it is very much because, as has been said of him, 'the man himself is eclipsed by the brilliancy of his deeds:' like the sun in a gorgeous western sky, when the pile of amber clouds—the golden linings and drapery with which he is surrounded—pale the lustre of the great luminary.

"Four elements of strength appear to stand out conspicuously in Joshua's character, and which distinguish him pre-eminently in the Old Testament as 'the warrior saint.'

"**I. Zeal for God's honour.** This seemed to have been his paramount aim and motive through life. Examples: It was so at the passage of the Jordan; in the interview with the Captain of the Lord's host; in the rearing of the altar at Ebal; in the addresses at Shiloh and Shechem.

"**II. Deference to God's law.** Like every true and loyal soldier, he acted up to the orders of his superior: the reading of the Law at Ebal; the commemorative 'altar of whole stones;' the counsel offered in chap. xxiii. 6, and the urgent words in chap. xxiv. 27. . . . Amid the duties and difficulties, the cares and perplexities of life, how many a pang and tear would it save us if we went with chastened and inquiring spirits to these sacred oracles! This antiquated volume is still the 'Book of books,' the oracle of oracles, the beacon of beacons; the poor man's treasury; the child's companion; the sick man's health; the dying man's life; shallows for the infant to walk in, depths for giant intellect to explore and adore.

"**III. Dependence on God's strength.** 'Certainly I will be with thee,' was the guarantee with which he accepted his onerous responsibilities as leader of the many thousands of Israel. In this spirit Joshua cast himself upon God at the time of his defeat at Ai, and in the battle with the five kings of the South at Beth-horon—the Marathon of ancient Canaan.

"**IV. Trust in God's faithfulness.** When Joshua first undertook to lead the armies of Israel, this was the warrant and encouragement on which he set out: 'I the Lord am with thee whithersoever thou goest.' . . . When the land had been partitioned to the various tribes, Joshua records this emphatic attestation, 'There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel: all came to pass' (chap. xxi. 45). . . . As surely as Joshua's zeal and trust and fortitude crowned his arms with victory, so surely, if we, in the noble gospel sense, 'quit us like men, and be strong,' God will give us the rest He promises—the rest which remains for His people."—[*J. R. Mac Duff.*]

JOSHUA'S HUMILITY AND SELF-FORGETFULNESS.

"Two things are very characteristic of Joshua's great virtue of modesty:

"1. *His humility and unselfishness in regard to any possessions or advantages for himself or his family.* He appropriated nothing forcibly as his own. No claim is put forward to any reward for his long and faithful service. No boastful allusion is made either to his courage or to his patience.

"2. *His remarkable forgetfulness of self in his most solemn concluding addresses to the assembled people.* It is very striking to observe how his own credit is not accounted of at all. It is still, in fact, as if even now he were standing before Moses, as his minister and servant."—[*Dean Howson.*]

THE EFFECT OF JOSHUA'S VICTORIES.

"We who live in these later days can see that the whole history of man hung upon the issue of those battles in the plain of Jericho and on the hills of Beth-horon. What other conflicts have ever decided so much for humanity? Joshua stood on those fields of blood the very world-hero, bearing with him all its destinies. If Israel had been subdued by the Canaanites, if the separated seed had been mingled with the heathen, if it had learned their ways, if the worship of Moab and Chemosh and Moloch and Astarte had superseded the worship of Jehovah, how had all the grand designs of redemption been frustrated in their development! The cry of Joshua after the flight at Ai would have been the despairing utterance of the race of men: 'And what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?'"

"More almost in Joshua's history than anywhere besides may the troubled soul—perplexed and harassed by the sight, on this sin-defiled earth, of wars, battles, slaughters, pestilences, earthquakes, miseries, and treasons—rest itself, though it be with the deep sob of a present broken-heartedness, in the conviction that God has a plan for this world; that in the end it does prevail; that the Baalim of heathen power must fall before Him, and that His kingdom shall stand for ever and ever in its truth and righteousness and love."—[*Bp. Wilberforce.*]

JOSHUA A TYPE OF CHRIST.

"In more various points, and with a closer similarity of outline than belongs, perhaps, to any other figure in the Old Testament, is Joshua the type of Christ. His very name begins the great intimation. Changed by Moses—doubtless at the mouth of the Lord—from Oshea, 'welfare,' to Jehoshua, or Jesus, 'God the Saviour;' it pointed him out as the figure in the earthly of the heavenly deliverer. Joshua is pre-eminently one of the people whom he delivers; he has worked with them in the brick-kilns of Egypt, he knows their hearts; in all their afflictions he has been afflicted.

"When Joshua has entered on his leadership, prophetic acts, full of typical significance, begin with a wonderful minuteness to repeat themselves. He, and not the great lawgiver, is to bring the people into Canaan: Moses must depart to secure his every word of promise being fulfilled to Israel, as the law must pass away and be fulfilled before the spiritual Israel could enter on that kingdom. At the river Jordan Joshua is shewn by God to Israel as their appointed leader; there God began to magnify him. As Jesus comes up from the river Jordan, the heavens open, the Holy Ghost descends, and the voice of God declares, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' From Jordan's bed Joshua took twelve stones to be for evermore a witness to the people of their great deliverance; from His baptism in Jordan Jesus began to call His twelve apostles, the foundation stones of that church which witnesses to every generation of the redemption of the sons of Abraham by Christ. Twelve stones Joshua buried under the returning waters of Jordan; and over the first twelve Jesus let the stream of death flow as over others. . . .

"Before Joshua departed, he called to him on that mountain of Timnath-Serah, which he was about to leave, all the heads of the tribes, and with the chant of a prophetic voice set before them all the grand future, which, if they clave steadfastly to God, should certainly be theirs; and so before He ascended into the heavens did the great Captain of God's spiritual army appoint to meet upon a mountain top in Galilee the heads of all the tribes into which His church should multiply; and there, looking with them over the far outstretched dominions of the earth, utter to them, Joshua-like, the words of wonder which rang for ever in their ears, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth: go ye therefore, and evangelize all nations.'

"Yea, and yet again, after a higher sort than belongs to this present world, was Joshua but the type of Jesus. For it is He who, for each one who follows Him, the true High Priest, divides the cold waters of death, setting against

their utmost flood, even when that Jordan overfloweth his banks, as he doth all the harvest time, the ark of the body which He took of us, and in which God dwelleth evermore; so making a way for His ransomed to pass over. It is He who hath gone before to prepare amongst the many mansions of His Father's house the place which the golden lot marks out for us. It is He who hath trodden down all our enemies. It is He who hath built the golden city upon the 'twelve foundation-stones which bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.' It is He at whose trumpet sound, when the seven days of the great week are accomplished, the walls of Babylon shall fall. It is He who goeth forth conquering and to conquer, until all His enemies are put under His feet; and so the last type of this life of wonders shall be fulfilled, and the true Joshua, from the exceeding high mountain of His Timnath-Serah, shall look around Him on the tribes of God, and see them all at peace; the prayer-promise which was breathed in time fulfilled in eternity: 'Father, I will that those whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which I had with Thee before the world was.'"—[*Bp. Wilberforce.*]

## *MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses* 29—33.

THE SOLDIER, THE SERVANT, AND THE PRIEST.

I. **The faithful warrior.** Joshua comes before us as the leader of the militant host of God. The first we see of him is on the battle-field at Rephidim. Throughout almost his whole life he is seen in connection with war. During the closing years of his life, though no longer fighting, we think of him as the conqueror at peace. As has been suggested, the lines from the "Ode to the Duke of Wellington" may be taken as not inaptly describing some of the strongly marked features of this great ancient captain's life:—

> "The man of long-enduring blood,
> The statesman-warrior, moderate, resolute,
> Whole in himself, a common good.
> . . . . The man of amplest influence,
> Yet clearest of ambitious crime;
> The greatest, yet with least pretence:
> Great in council and great in war,
> Foremost captain of his time,
> Rich in saving common sense,
> And, as the greatest only are,
> In his simplicity sublime.
> O good gray head which all men knew,
> O voice from which their omens all men drew,
> O iron nerve to true occasion true,
> O fall'n at length that tower of strength
> Which stood four-square to all the winds that blew!"—*Tennyson.*

Whatever else he may have been, in Joshua we have the man who, above all others in history, may be emphatically called "the soldier of God." And the great warrior was faithful: Scripture has against him no complaint whatever. II. **The faithful son and servant.** "And the bones of Joseph," *etc.* What Joshua was in the field, that was Joseph in the family. Singularly enough, they both died at exactly the same age (cf. Gen. l. 26). As with Joshua, Joseph's life, two hundred years before, was full of temptation. The dying words of Jacob fitly tell us, "The archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him." But Joseph, no less than Joshua, was faithful: "His bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." Scripture makes no complaint, either, against Joseph. III. **The faithful priest.** "And Eleazar the son of Aaron died." With a similar faithfulness

Eleazar also appears to have served both his generation and his God. We do not know the exact time of either his birth or death.

These three blameless lives, resting here together at their close, in the records of Old Testament history, seem half to shadow forth the threefold work of the coming Saviour. Joseph is the faithful prophet, whose dreams foretell his life, and whose life begins both to foretell and to inaugurate the coming fulfilment of God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Eleazar is the faithful priest, whose very name—"the help of God," or "one whom God helps"—is strangely akin to that of Joshua; while Joshua himself, as the ruler of the host of Israel, serves to conclude the number of the sacred trio which, whether intentionally or not, points with much suggestiveness to Jesus the Saviour, who is, in His own person, at once Prophet, Priest, and King.

## *OUTLINES AND COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.*

Verse 30.—The Graves of Moses and Joshua.

1. *The grave of the one great man was perfectly well known, and accurately marked, while that of the other was altogether unknown.* The monument has little to do with the man. 2. *One man was buried by his fellows, the other by his God.* Who shall say which was the more loved by God? God's various treatment of His servants does not arise from His varying love, but from their differing wants. Probably the Israelites of the days of Moses could not have borne to know where Moses lay.

The Tomb of Joshua.

"Lieut. Conder says of the tomb of Joshua: 'This is certainly the most striking monument in the country, and strongly recommends itself to the mind as an authentic site. That it is the sepulchre of a man of distinction is manifest from the great number of lamp niches which cover the walls of the porch: they are over two hundred, arranged in vertical rows, and all smoke-blacked. One can well imagine the wild and picturesque appearance presented at any time when the votive lamps were all in place, and the blaze of light shone out of the wild hill-side, casting long shadows from the central columns. The present appearance of the porch is also very picturesque, with the dark shadows and bright light, and the trailing boughs which droop from above.' The tomb is a square chamber, with five excavations on three of its sides, the central one forming a passage leading into a second chamber beyond. Here is a single cavity, with a niche for a lamp; and here, there is good reason to believe, is the resting-place of the warrior chief of Israel. It is curious that when so large a number of travellers come annually to Palestine, so few visit a spot of such transcendent interest."—[*S. S. Teacher.*]

Verse 31.—The Holy Influences of a Holy Life.

I. **The fruits of a man's life are of the same kind as the seed.** "Israel served *the Lord.*" They did not serve the devil. They did not serve idols. They did not even serve themselves. Joshua served Jehovah—that was the seed; Israel, too, "served Jehovah"—that was the fruit. As the seed, so the harvest. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

II. **The fruits of a life that is really holy are both abundant and abiding.** 1. "*Israel served the Lord.*" Not here and there an Israelite, but Israel generally. God's fields yield better than many think they do. 2. "*Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days,*" *etc.* Joshua's influence was greatest on those who knew him best. "The elders" were so filled with his spirit, that, even when he was taken from them, they continued to lead the people Godward. Those who had seen most of Joshua became new centres of power to convey his pious spirit to others. The influence of many, for good, diminishes as others come near to them. That life must be blessed indeed that so holds all who are round about it in the service of God, that

when the life itself is removed, they who have seen it continually perpetuate it in others.

III. The good fruits of a holy life are through a natural growth, but by the grace of God. 1. *There is growth through processes that are natural.* The effect of example. Men's love of realness. The influence of a strong will, made strong by the sense of right, on men of less faith and fervour. 2. *The great cause of growth is in the grace of God.* The men were influenced, not merely by what Joshua was, but by "all the works of the Lord" which Joshua had done. Joshua's holy life would have done little, but for the memory of God's presence, as at Jordan, and Jericho, and Ai, and Beth-horon.

See how much human reasoning and human creeds are at the mercy of a good and God-honoured life. There must have been in Israel many men quite as able as those who in the following generation professed to doubt God, and turned to idols. The lives of men like Whitfield, the Wesleys, Henry Martyn, Bishop Patteson, or even the lives of pious soldiers like Col. Gardiner, Hedley Vicars, and Henry Havelock, are sufficient to upset the reasonings of hosts of men who, but for such lives, would presently say that Scripture "evidences" were not good enough to satisfy what they would then call their "intelligence." There is no argument against goodness and unselfishness and love, such as were seen in Joshua.

Verse 32.—The Honour which God puts upon Faith.

In order to gather the true force of its teaching, this verse must be read in its connection with the dying utterances of Joseph (Gen. l. 24, 25). Taken in this connection, it suggests the following considerations:—

I. The faith of a man who had very little help from sight. When Joseph said, "God will surely bring you out of this land," there was very little in the appearances of things to encourage his trust. 1. *Faith that has once taken hold on the living God can bear very much thwarting in things which are visible.* (*a*) Joseph had believed in God when a mere lad. His two dreams. These were told in such simple trust, that even his fond father was offended. His brethren saw that he believed, and they called him "this dreamer." (*b*) But Joseph's early faith had a severe shock. How about his trust in God when his brethren gathered to kill him? How did he feel about the truth of his dreams when he was in the pit? How did his faith hold out when he found himself sold now to the Ishmeelites, and now to the Egyptian captain, as a slave? How about his faith in the benefits of integrity, when for being true to himself, true to his master, and true to his God, he was cast into prison? What had become of his dreams, when for the space of two years, or, as some think, seven or eight, he lay in custody, burdened with his bondage, and troubled still more with conflicting thoughts? "Until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tried him." How could he believe this other promise, and give "commandment concerning his bones," when there seemed so little prospect of its fulfilment? Just because, all his life long, God had been training His servant to trust, "not in the things which are seen, but in the things which are not seen." Joseph had lived to see his dreams come true. His father and his brethren had bowed down to him, though it had often seemed that he could never look upon them again. God had trained His servant to trust, not because of appearances, but in spite of them. 2. *True faith contemplates life and death with equal calmness.* Joseph said, "I die;" and the knowledge of approaching death brought no trouble, and wrought no disturbance to his faith. 3. *Faith reckons the promise of God to be of infinitely more value than earthly possessions.* Joseph had said, "Ye shall carry up my bones from hence." He shews us in that single commandment what he really thought of all his glory in Egypt. He had won his honours in Egypt. His grave would be revered there. His children, apparently, might look for good positions in the land for which their father had wrought so much. All this, compared with God's promise

of Canaan, was nothing to Joseph. He persisted in feeling only a stranger and a sojourner in the land, Nothing therein he "called is own." His great heritage was in God's covenant. "Carry up my bones," said the dying man; Carry them up to the place where God will dwell with His people. 4. *Firm faith in death is the outcome of a true heart in life.* Joseph had been faithful, and held fast his integrity. Joseph had shewn a spirit of gracious forgiveness towards his brethren. This was the man who could trust God in death. 5. *Such faith gathers something of its strength from the faithful who have gone before.* The trust of dying Joseph was very like the trust of dying Jacob. Joseph's father had preceded him in this very matter in which the son afterwards followed. The faith of the son reads almost like a reflection of the bright faith of the father (cf. Gen. xlvii. 29, 30; xlviii. 21, 22; xlix.; l. 24, 25). We who believe now, owe much to the faith of those who believed before us. As is the faith of the fathers, so, at least sometimes, is the faith of the children.

**II. The faith of a man who honoured God honoured by God.** "And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem." In the very place where Jacob had bought ground of the children of Hamor, and where he had built an altar, calling it, "God, the God of Israel," there did God enable Joseph's descendants to lay their believing ancestor's bones. 1. *Our faith should rest, not in appearances, but in the living God.* He endures well who endures "as seeing Him who is invisible." And such faith God ever honours. The honour may be long in coming. It was two hundred years after Joseph had so believed, that God thus magnified his trust But the recognition came at last. God's "visions," given to a believing soul, are all "for an appointed time." 2. *We should be more ready to look on the fulfilments of the Divine word than on what seem its failures.* We *know* when God's word does come to pass; we only *think* when we conclude it has failed. The promise of Canaan was given first to Abraham. But Stephen tells us, "God gave him none inheritance in it, no, no not so much as to set his foot on" (Acts vii. 5). To Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, also, the promise may at times have seemed to have failed. Yet, here it is, all fulfilled. We know little about failures. We only see a little way. All time is God's. *What men hastily deem God's failures to fulfil His promise, are often the very beginnings of its fulfilment.* (*a*) It had been so in Joseph's life. It was at the pit of Dothan that God began to fulfil Joseph's dream that his father and brethren should render him obeisance. Precisely at the point where Joseph might have been tempted to say, "My dream has all come to nought," there God began to fulfil the dream. It was by the prison that so "tried" Joseph, that God put His servant close to the throne of Pharaoh. Just where Joseph would be most cast down, God was lifting him up. Every step of his life which might tempt him to think of failure, was one more advance of God towards fulfilment. (*b*) It was no less so in Joseph's death. The Pharaoh "who knew not Joseph" could not arise till Joseph was gone. Then the oppression made way for the liberation. The "bitter bondage" was God's pathway to full liberty. When we say, with Tennyson,

> "What am I?
> An infant crying in the night,
> An infant crying for the light,
> And with no language but a cry,"

we too often forget that the very night out of which we cry is necessary to the morning. God ever makes His darkness precede His light. Not the morning and evening, but "the evening and the morning were the first day;" and such has it been with all days since.

**III. The honour which God puts upon the faith of the dead, an encouragement gladly noted by the faithful living.** Believing chroniclers saw that their forefathers had believed not in vain, and so they wrote down here this record of the burial of Joseph's bones. The believing love not only to say, "He that believeth *shall* not be confounded," but presently to bear their testimony that such *have not been* confounded. To mark God's fulfilment of

His faithful word, strengthens our own faith; it strengthens, no less, the faith of others.

THE TIME OF THE BURIAL OF JOSEPH'S BONES.

"This burying of the bones of Joseph probably took place when the conquest of the land was completed, and each tribe had received its inheritance; for it is not likely that this was deferred till after the death of Joshua."—[*Dr. A. Clarke.*]

Verse 32.—THREE GENERATIONS OF HIGH PRIESTS.

"After the fathers shall come up the children; so, after the fathers do the children go down also to the grave. The men who had seen God's mighty works in the wilderness gave place to men who would have to walk more by faith, and less by sight.

At the very close of these records of Joshua—one of the persons who most significantly, of all the Old Testament characters, prefigures the coming Christ—we have this statement, in a single and final verse, about three generations of high priests. Two of these generations had already passed away; the remaining one waited for a season to usher in yet other successors. These also, though by contrast tell us of Him who is a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec; who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." "For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath which was since the law maketh the Son high priest, who is consecrated for evermore."

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